

WINTER 2019 | VOLUME 45 | NUMBER 1

concordia journal



*On the cover: the interior of the newly redesigned
Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library.*

Issued by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, the *Concordia Journal* is the successor of *Lehre und Wehre* (1855-1929), begun by C. F. W. Walther, a founder of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Lehre und Wehre* was absorbed by the *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1930-1974) which was published by the faculty of Concordia Seminary as the official theological periodical of the Synod.

Concordia Journal is abstracted in *Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete*, *New Testament Abstracts*, *Old Testament Abstracts*, and *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. It is indexed in ATLA Religion Database/ATLAS and Christian Periodicals Index. Article and issue photocopies in 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, and 105mm microfiche are available from National Archive Publishing (www.napubco.com).

Books submitted for review should be sent to the editor. Manuscripts submitted for publication should conform to a Chicago Manual of Style. Email submission (cj@csl.edu) as a Word attachment is preferred. Editorial decisions about submissions include peer review. Manuscripts that display Greek or Hebrew text should utilize BibleWorks fonts (www.bibleworks.com/fonts.html). Copyright © 1994-2009 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

The *Concordia Journal* (ISSN 0145-7233) is published quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall). The annual subscription rate is \$25 (individuals) and \$75 (institutions) payable to Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105. New subscriptions and renewals also available at <http://store.csl.edu>. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Concordia Journal*, Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105-3196.

concordia Journal

A Concordia Seminary St. Louis Publication



concordia journal

Volume 45 Number 1

Editorials	Editor's Note	7
	Why Go to Church Every Sunday?: Three Reasons from 1 Peter <i>Dale A. Meyer</i>	8
	Recapping SBL 2018 <i>James Voelz</i>	13
	Remembering Lamin Sanneh <i>Joel Elowsky</i>	15
Articles	Of the Making of Books There Is No End <i>Robert Rosin</i>	21
	Inclined to Boast <i>A. Trevor Sutton</i>	33
	Two Responses to Joel Okamoto's "When Salt Loses Its Saltiness" <i>Erik Herrmann</i>	45
	Picking up the Pieces: A Response to Nihilism <i>Michael Zeigler</i>	47
	The Preacher as Worldmaker: Reflections on the Nature and Purpose of Christian Preaching <i>Peter Nafzger</i>	51
Homiletical Helps	Proclaiming in His Name: Preaching the Gospel of Luke in Year C <i>Jeffrey A. Oswald</i>	65
Reviews		77

Publisher

Dale A. Meyer
President

Executive Editor

Charles Arand
*Dean of Theological
Research and Publication*

Editor

Travis J. Scholl
*Managing Editor of
Theological Publications*

Assistant Editor

Melanie Appelbaum

Assistant

Mason Vieth

Creative Director

Jayna Rollings

Graphic Designer

XiaoPei Chen
Michelle Poneleit

Design Assistant

Amanda Hellwege

Faculty

David Adams
Charles Arand
Abjar Bahkou
Andrew Bartelt
Joel Biermann
Gerhard Bode
Kent Bureson
Timothy Dost
Thomas Egger
Joel Elowsky
Jeffrey Gibbs
Benjamin Haupt
Erik Herrmann
David Lewis
Richard Marrs
David Maxwell
Dale Meyer
Peter Nafzger

Glenn Nielsen
Joel Okamoto
Jeffrey Oswald
David Peter
Victor Raj
Paul Robinson
Mark Rockenbach
Douglas Rutt
Timothy Saleska
Leopoldo Sánchez M.
David Schmitt
Bruce Schuchard
William Schumacher
Mark Seifrid
Kou Seying
W. Mart Thompson
James Voelz

Exclusive subscriber digital access via ATLAS to
Concordia Journal & Concordia Theology Monthly
<http://search.ebscohost.com>
User ID: **ATL0102231ps**
Password: **subscriber**
Technical problems?
Email: support@atla.com

All correspondence should be sent to:
CONCORDIA JOURNAL
801 Seminary Place
St. Louis, Missouri 63105
314-505-7117
cj@csl.edu

Editorials

Editor's Note

While I was listening to Professor Emeritus Robert Rosin wax eloquent at Concordia Seminary's (re)dedication of the Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library last summer (and now reading those lines revised for these pages), I was reminded of a little fact related in Keith Houston's history of the book aptly titled *The Book*: "More books were made in the first half century after Gutenberg's Bible [circa 1454] than in the preceding thousand years put together."

Let that sink in. Once you have movable type, what had taken 1,000 years now took 50. No small wonder the (Western) world would never be the same.

No small wonder too that it would take another 500 years before a parallel revolution. Professor Rosin hints at this latter moment with a similar little fact: "I have more books on my Kindle than Thomas Aquinas had available in the medieval University of Paris library." As Trevor Sutton more than hints in his own article in these pages, it is all about the Technology, the *techne* with its *logos*. No human work is possible absent the technologies that make it possible, as true for the Stone Age as the Digital Age, from the Paleolithic to the Anthropocene.

What is striking about these twin moments in history is how they simultaneously accelerate their productions with a previously unimaginable speed while proliferating their effects with a previously unimaginable sprawl. I am old enough to remember (fondly, I might add) many childhood moments perusing the leather-bound volumes of my family's World Book encyclopedia, a temporary stay against summer boredom when it was too hot to play catch. Now, I have a thousand shelves of encyclopedic entries—each edited in real time by thousands of worldwide readers—in my pocket, thanks to Wikipedia and my smartphone.

The crux of it, just like it was in the fifteenth century, is that it leaves technology's users in a bind. The synapses can't fire fast enough to take it all in, let alone to sift the facts from the fake news or even the fake news from the #fakenews. It will take a good long time before we can synthesize (another transliteration from the Greek, "to put together, compose") what it all means. Perhaps this is a small part of what Joel Okamoto was up to when he spelled out "normal nihilism" in the previous issue of the *Concordia Journal*. Peter Nafzger and Michael Zeigler continue to spell out its implications as they respond to Professor Okamoto here and now.

All of it is just a start in trying to figure out this vexed cultural moment, at least until the next technology comes along to turn everything on its head all over again.

Travis J. Scholl
Managing Editor of *Theological Publications*

Why Go to Church Every Sunday? Three Reasons from 1 Peter

Pastors know many people who consider themselves good church members but worship only a time or two a month, if that. Decades ago when America's public culture complemented the life and teachings of the church in many ways, weekly church attendance was commonly accepted as the thing to do, even by those who skipped. What is different today? In some places, the reason might be problems in the local congregation, but the overall cause is today's changed culture. Rather than acquiesce, I think we can offer compelling reasons to encourage weekly church attendance. Gathering for Word and Sacrament with local believers has always been of the utmost importance, but in our post-churched times the habit of weekly worship is especially helpful for the baptized. About this 1 Peter is instructive. It offers grand themes: The centrality of Jesus Christ and his work, the generative power of the word, obedience to the will of God rather than emotions, focus on the future return of Christ in judgment and the full realization of salvation, honor to those who represent the institutions of the day, and others. From these I draw three reasons why weekly worship is important.

First, we go to church every week because societal forces pulling us away from church are stronger than ever. Back in "Christian America" people accepted the idea of absolute truth, even if it was only lip service, but today it's "You have your opinion; I have mine. Who are you to tell me that I'm wrong?" What shapes people's opinions today? Absent obedience to objective truth, it is the almighty me: my emotions, my will, and rationalizations thereof. Eavesdrop on people's conversations and you hear them talking about how they are feeling about someone or something. Watch media and you find rationalized passions and self-serving partisanship. American public culture has lost the unifying center it had decades ago. Modern man is turned in on himself. And honestly, don't you and I constantly monitor our feelings too? Daily devotions help keep the word before us, but tally the time parishioners spend in daily devotion versus the peer pressure put on them day-in and day-out by people and media. On this side of eternity Christian life must be a conscious back-and-forth between stuff during the week and God's revealed truth through preaching, teaching, and fellowship on Sundays. Strong societal pulls away from church is reason for the discipline of weekly worship. Parishioners can answer the call of the church bell every few weeks, but personally, I would find it scary to give my wandering feelings that much freedom. I need the weekly gathering to keep norming my life by the word.

1 Peter contrasts human emotions turned inward with obedience to God's revealed truth in the lives of the baptized. "As obedient children, do not be conformed

to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” We are “to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Pt 1:14; 2:11; 4:2). The passions Peter identifies are conducts church people today would readily disavow: “sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” (4:3), and Peter’s hearers had stopped participating in such public sins (4:4), but gross sins are not the only emotions Peter has in mind. “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” (2:1). Those sins are more likely to show up in a congregation. Don’t you know! Gross sins or more subtle conducts, both are a giving into emotions of the sinful flesh. Peter calls his hearers to the different lifestyle—holiness—which comes from their baptismal rebirth: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1:14–15). First-century Asia Minor was filled with forces pulling people away from their congregations. Today’s American public culture is doing the same. Now that our public life is no longer centered on Judeo-Christian values, the baptized need more than ever to put ourselves in obedience to the word. Weekly worship does that.

Second, we go to church every Sunday (or weekend, I know) because we want to understand our lives in light of the word of Christ. “We’re sinners but Jesus died for our sins” is true but not enough to make people come back. The late professor Martin Scharlemann said somewhere that a pastor’s job is “to interpret reality theologically.” When the baptized understand theologically what’s going on “out there,” they are better grounded in saving faith (“grow up to salvation,” 2:2) and better equipped to share their faith during the week, as Peter says, “being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pt 3:15). How do the dynamics of law and gospel, the two kingdoms, the now-and-not-yet tension of faith, and the like, illustrate what we are all experiencing as we try to live as followers of Jesus in post-churched America? If sermons and Bible studies don’t seize on some of what’s happening “out there,” then faith easily gets compartmentalized to an isolated hour of vague spirituality rather than engaging the baptized incarnationally for their vocations during the week. I am talking about public society giving us teachable moments; Jesus seized on them all the time. He used illness and demon possession to attract people to his teaching about the kingdom (Lk 4:31–44). He showed empathy for Simon’s work that netted converts to his mission (Lk 5:1–11). Gospel lesson after gospel lesson, Jesus used the stuff of daily life to teach about the kingdom of God. 1 Peter explains reality theologically by constant reference to the person and specific works of Jesus Christ. “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1:20–21). In almost every exhortation in the epistle, Peter norms Christian

conduct with the person of Christ and the specific work of Jesus that informs conduct in the various vocations of his hearers. It is not uncommon for you and me to preach and teach about Christian faith and life in general ways, but what strikes me is Peter's christocentric directness: Your distinctive lifestyle is that of Jesus Christ. You have been born again as children of obedience. Here is how it plays out for you in your vocation as servant, as spouse, and so on.

Why go to church every Sunday? Third, because the weekly gathering is a practical link teaching individuals how to navigate life "out there." Your congregation has a role as a "mediating institution." In recent decades, two contradictory trends have weakened the local congregation. On one hand, there is hyper-individualism, "man turned in on himself," the self-idolatry of our culture. On the other hand—and this goes against American's rampant individualism—people have grown to rely upon centralized institutions, like government and big business, to fix their needs. Institutions in the middle, like congregations, have been weakened. Social commentator Yuval Levin describes it well.

Individualism tends to weaken mediating power centers that stand between the individual and the nation as a whole—from families to local communities (including local governments), (and) religious institutions. . . . In their place, it strengthens individuals, on the one hand, and a central government, on the other, since such a government is most able to treat individuals equally by treating them all impersonally. For this reason, a hyper-individualist culture is likely to be governed by a hyper-centralized government, and each is likely to exacerbate the worst inclinations of the other.¹

That is part of the reason why church attendance is down. Society has influenced people to look within themselves for truth and direction, and when things are not going well, to look to an impersonal Big Brother. In "Christian America" the congregation had a mediating role between the individual and the world "out there." Your local congregation can reclaim, consciously and in publicity, that mediating role. For example, Bethany Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas, describes itself as "A Belonging Place and a Launching Base." That captures the mediating role your congregation can serve.

Peter sees the congregations throughout Asia Minor as mediating institutions, gatherings to help individual believers conduct themselves with holiness "out there." He gave guidance on how to live in a non-Christian society that was often unfriendly, even to the point of shunning Christians. The recipients of his letter were not subject to an empire-wide persecution. There were sporadic, localized persecutions, and Peter may have written when Nero was blaming and punishing Christians for the fire of Rome in 64, but even that was localized. Writing from Rome, Peter had information about what the young churches were experiencing in Asia Minor. He

teaches individuals how to navigate situations where there can be hostility against the faith. He counsels submission to people in power, to government (2:17–18), to masters (2:18–25), to believing wives of non-believing husbands (3:1–6), to believing husbands to honor their wives as co-heirs “of the grace of life” (3:7), and to all in general (3:8–12). The last thing that Peter wanted was for his hearers to misunderstand Christian liberty and thereby add to the jeopardy of the fledgling church. Instead, he counsels his hearers to live out their vocations with submission to people in power and good works imitating Christ and for the sake of his mission. “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil-doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:11–12).

To be an effective mediating institution, the quality of congregational life should be inviting. Since pressure from peers to give up or compromise Christian faith was intense in Peter’s day, and because media and popular opinion are insidiously persuasive in our own time, winsome congregational life in all aspects—worship, socializing, and good works in the community—attracts and helps keep believers in the fold. John Barclay has shown that St. Paul desired his congregations to have different value systems than those of the culture.

The gift of God in Christ is articulated as an unconditioned gift in its creation of a community that neither mirrors nor endorses the regnant systems of value. . . . Paul makes clear that the truth of the good news is entirely lost if it is not enacted in creative social relations that are apt to challenge central features of their cultural environment. The relationship between “theology” and “social practice” is thus mutually constitutive: it is the Christ-event that gives meaning and shape to communal practice, while it is in social practice that the nature of the Christ-event is, or is not, realized.²

Similarly, Peter urged his hearers to make their congregations different from everything else experienced during the week.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 4:8–11).

Worshipping every Sunday informs lives of vocation in the world. This mediating role is an important function in our Christian witness to contemporary America. Levin writes:

The ultimate soul-forming institutions in a free society are frequently religious institutions. Traditional religion offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the age of fracture. Religious commitments command us to a mixture of responsibility, sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free.”³

These three reasons—there are more—for going to church every Sunday do not minimize our traditional reason for worship, the baptized gathering around Word and Sacrament. In truth, these reasons elevate the importance of the Means of Grace in the context of the twenty-first century. If we are perplexed why people are coming to church less often, we might be looking at things through a twentieth century, “Christian America” lens, when in fact we are blessed with new times and new opportunities. Your congregation has always been important, but in these new times it’s more important than ever. Let’s teach our people the benefits of weekly church attendance!

Dale A. Meyer
President

Endnotes

- 1 Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 99–100.
- 2 John M. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 439.
- 3 Levin, 204.

Recapping SBL 2018

This year's annual national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature occurred in the Mile High City, in circumstances that were just perfect. If you haven't been to Denver recently, especially traveling in from the airport, you are in for a treat. A really superb, dedicated rail-line whisks passengers from the terminals to Union Station downtown, on 16th Street, where a bus service takes passengers up and down the pedestrian-dedicated boulevard free of charge. Nothing could be easier or more convenient, and it's cheap, too (9 bucks each way—and only \$4.50 if you are old like me!).

The conference sessions occurred in the convention center and in several adjacent hotels, all within one block of one another. As usual, the books display was a crowd pleaser, with scores and scores of publishers hawking their wares, including our own Concordia Publishing House, whose booth was manned by Dr. Christopher Mitchell and his wife, Carol. Great to see the Concordia Commentaries prominently displayed, included the latest offering by Jeff Gibbs, *Matthew 21:1–28:20*.

The sessions, as always, were of mixed value. Since I always go to edgy hermeneutical things, I have no one to blame but myself for attending “Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible” and listening to “Violence Overcome by the Political Ontology of the Syrophoenician Woman,” as well as “The Subaltern Women in the Gospel: A Postcolonial Taxonomy.” But, seriously, somebody has to keep a finger on the pulse, even if some of these folks have difficulty keeping a finger on the text. But there were many really striking and helpful presentations, as well.

Worthy to be highlighted were the following:

Thomas Schmidt, “*The Testamonium Flavianum* in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Reports about Jesus,” which took a different look at the well-known positive “testimony” of Josephus concerning Jesus in *Antiquities* 18, which virtually all consider to be a Christian interpolation into his text, and suggested that it may well be genuine if read differently, i.e., with an understanding of its words and phrases as suspicious of and not laudatory of Jesus.

Editor's note

This editorial was previously published on concordiatheology.org.

Fritz Graf, “Canonical Texts in Greek Religion: From Orpheus to Homer,” which asserted that in the ancient world, authors and not texts were authoritative.

Jens Schroeter, “The Canon of the New Testament: Some Observations concerning Its Origin and Meaning,” which gave a good summary of the relationship between the *regula fidei* and the Scriptures.

Bryan W. Y. Fletcher, “Voice in the Greek of the New Testament,” which explored the Greek verb with, let us say, not entirely satisfactory results (you cannot just cherry-pick your evidence!).

It must be said that the Gospel of Mark sections were the focus of my attendance at the conference. Four were on the schedule, with one a joint section with the Synoptic Gospels section, considering the 25th anniversary of Richard Burridge’s foundational work “What are the Gospels?” and another an open section with papers on various topics, including James M. Neumann’s interesting and valuable “The Intertextual Memory of Mark 1:11.” Central, however, were the two sections with the common theme “Reading Mark: The Interpretive Implications of Mark’s Original Format.” These considered issues surrounding orality, oral presentation, audience, etc. At the first of these, I presented a short paper entitled “Hearing Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane” and, related to it, gave an oral presentation/performance of Mark 14:32–43. With this pairing I sought to show that a close reading of the text is foundational to an oral presentation, but also that an oral presentation raises awareness of issues and problems that a silent reading of a text will likely miss. This went well and elicited lively discussion.

Finally, let me commend Andy Bartelt for his continuing leadership in organizing a “Concordia Reception” for those associated with, as well as friends of, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Publishing House. While each of the three entities chip in funds, it is clear who bears the greatest responsibility.

All in all, this was one of the better SBL meetings in recent memory. This year’s event will be held in San Diego, California, again, the weekend before Thanksgiving.

James Voelz

Remembering Lamin Sanneh

Lamin Sanneh was the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School. He died on Epiphany, January 6, 2019 after suffering a stroke. Professor Sanneh had just accepted an invitation to speak at Concordia Seminary this April at our 2019 Multi-ethnic symposium. We were working out the details when we found out about his untimely death. To say it was a shock is an understatement. We had just been exchanging emails the week before. In my last email exchange with him he was getting ready for Christmas dinner with family and, as he put it, was in the “throes of creation culinary-wise.” Lamin knew how to enjoy a good meal and a fine glass of Sancerre. Those meals together are some of my best memories with him.

There will no doubt be any number of tributes to a man who had such a significant influence and impact on World Christianity. The Yale website details all the different academic positions he held in Africa, England, and here in America at Harvard and Yale. He authored and edited at least a dozen books on relations between Christianity and Islam, along with over 200 articles that were stand-alone monographs or parts of collected works on history, Christianity, or Islam. He received numerous awards, among which was the *Commandeur de l'Ordre National Du Lion of Senegal* which helped explain all the attention we received in Dakar where we held our second conference on early African Christianity there. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

He was a professor, prolific author, colleague, church-statesman, mentor, husband, father—and friend. For the last ten years I was privileged to know him in many different capacities, but the most important for me was as a friend. We met in 2007 when I was the executive director for the Center for Early African Christianity (then at Drew University, now at Yale). I was also serving at the time as research director for the Ancient Christian Commentary series. My colleague Mike Glerup had invited Lamin to participate in an exploratory conference we had scheduled in Addis Ababa that spring to see how African leaders, pastors, scholars would react to the idea of how Africa had shaped the Christian mind—a thesis that had been put forward by our friend and colleague Thomas Oden. Lamin was reluctant to accept the invitation. He told us his interests were more in the realm of the study of Islam and

Editor's note

This editorial was previously published on concordiatheology.org.

that he had not been back to Africa since he left almost thirty years prior when he had taught at the University of Ghana (1975-78). Nonetheless, we persisted and were blessed with his presence at that conference and many other venues throughout our travels in Africa for the next ten years, including the Lausanne Conference in Cape Town where Lamin delivered a lecture on religious freedom that we sponsored.

Everywhere we went in Africa Lamin was treated like a famous rock star—only more so. This story may be only partially apocryphal, but I think I remember one time when we were talking with some Africans who had met U2’s lead singer, Bono, but they didn’t quite know who he was. Lamin Sanneh, on the other hand, was another matter. Him they knew. Lamin was so well known that when he would arrive at the airport in Senegal or the Gambia they would play the Sanneh anthem: Lamin had come from royal blood in the Gambia. We heard his family’s anthem on more than one occasion.

He was born into a Muslim family and so always had a special place in his heart for Islam. He was convinced the future of Islam lay in the pacifist tradition, but was not naïve enough to believe that all Muslims would agree on that point. His book *Beyond Jihad: Pacifist Impetus in Muslim West Africa and Beyond* (Oxford, 2016), which I reviewed in the Winter 2018 issue of the *Concordia Journal*, details his thesis more fully than can be treated in these pages. Suffice it to say he championed support for those Muslim clerics who were trying to take on the more radical forms of Islam, often at risk of their own lives. He had grown up as a Muslim and never forgot his roots in that tradition, even as he knew those roots were not sufficient to nurture something deeper inside him that had emerged from the Spirit.

Lamin told me once how he had been converted to Christianity. It was through the kindness of strangers—Christians who had helped and supported him in his youth. Through them he had experienced the love of God. Islam had taught him to honor God, but he wanted to love God, a love which he only found in Jesus. This love made him a committed Roman Catholic convert, trusted by at least two popes to serve on various theological commissions such as the appointment by John Paul II to the Pontifical Commission of the Historical Sciences at the Vatican and by Pope Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with Muslims.

In the lectures I was privileged to hear him deliver he would often make the point that Christianity is the most translated religion in the world. Other religions, such as Islam, relied on a specific language such as Arabic for the authority of their sacred texts. Christianity was willing to take the risk in “translating the message”—the title of one of his most well-known books—into the heart language of all the nations of the world as the authoritative Word of God. This was a consistent theme in his lectures, his scholarship, expressed in his zeal for the mission of the church. The Christian message of God’s love in Jesus Christ was for everyone.

For those who would like to know more, I would recommend reading his autobiography, *Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African* (Eerdmans,

2012). While it was at first a reluctant homecoming, it was also one long overdue. Lamin Sanneh was an African who acknowledged his own debt to the great tradition of the African church and writers like Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine. And in the spirit of that great tradition, his influence went far beyond his continent to the larger world.

Lamin died on Sunday, the Feast of the Epiphany. While I would much rather have him around, I think he would agree that Epiphany in many ways sums up his work: the Gospel revealed to the Gentiles and to the world. *Requiescat in pace.*

Joel Elowsky

Articles

Of the Making of Books There Is No End —And That’s a Good Thing

Robert Rosin



Robert Rosin is professor emeritus in the Department of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. From 1988 to 1990 he was also acting director of Library Services.

The Old Testament preacher of Ecclesiastes once intoned, “Of the making of books there is no end.” Exasperated, the preacher then underscores his exhaustion as he continues, bemoaning the “weariness that comes from much study.”

What would he say today? Much has changed, but the question remains: to what end? Where is the grand solution, the killer app to make sense of it all? Given the Preacher’s line, it sounds as if we ought to be selling the place rather than celebrating a grand (re)opening of the Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library with upgraded support structure and space for still more books.

But could we take the Preacher’s line another way? This is not intended to be heretical, and it *is* a bit unorthodox and could be wrong, but an idea off-bubble is often useful, prompting a better idea or two. I expect my seminary faculty colleagues are as I am, having some friends in person and others in books who will not make it onto the Synod’s clergy roster, but who have interesting ideas, ways to put things that get our little gray cells moving along the way, and in the end, help us see something that enriches biblical theology. T. S. Eliot urges us to have honest conversations and suggests they pay off: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”¹ That is, we come full circle but are richer for it, not just being at home but also

Editor’s note

This text is a slightly revised version of the address given for the (re)opening of the Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, on August 24, 2018.



The Herzog August Library, in Wolfenbüttel, Lower Saxony, Germany.

knowing better what home is all about. As a Seminary colleague once put it, when you know where home is, you can afford to look around a bit and not lose sight. So again, let's gloss the preacher's line and look from a different angle. Take a risk, "sin boldly" (always good to preempt raised eyebrows by invoking Luther in defense) and let's see what happens: "Of the making of books there is no end"—and it's a good thing, too.

Books, books, and more books can be good, not just to guarantee the librarians' full-employment program. But books have positive worth for us all, even with the Preacher's sober take on things. Here's how: Ecclesiastes speaks poetically about the sobering limitations of life "under the sun," a downbeat message from the Preacher. Yet there is more that shapes this world, that breaks in from above the sun, as Luther noted in his comments on Ecclesiastes.² So along with the gritty message, the Preacher infers there is more to consider and more that lends value. What is near at hand indeed looks gloomy, but understand also that we live in a time between. In this

gap, all those books that seem to come without end potentially serve a useful purpose. If you think of us living not in an ultimate but rather in a penultimate world, then as we look around at this *Zwischenzeit*, this in-between age, we'll find plenty of things to do.³ And this is where books come in. Seen this way, the making of more books is a good thing. Think of them as instruction manuals for tasks that are never quite done (and never will be) but still are ours to do. After all, this is where we are for the time being. So rather than try to withdraw from life or shut our eyes to it and pretend it is not there, books help us better understand and get involved.

So even when our universe seems to flounder seeking meaning and purpose, we optimistically continue to gather information. Scrolls, codices, printed volumes, e-books, data files, and more fill countless shelves both real and virtual, in the hope of making some sense and finding a semblance of order in this world that we're still in, until a better world, a new heaven and a new earth, ultimately come along.

As we roll up our sleeves, we need to know about ourselves, about others, and the circumstances at hand. Context counts. Karl Jaspers, the Swiss German psychiatrist and philosopher, famously remarked: "Where I belong and what I am living for I first learn in the mirror of history."⁴ We are the product of all our yesterdays. And yet in the same moment, we live, as Kierkegaard observed already in his time, with a kind of "world historical forgetfulness."⁵ The antidote? Well, it ought to be obvious: more history. Faculty colleagues knew I would say that, but I have this history business on good authority. After all, as Martin Luther declared—and you should not argue with the big guy—"Historians are the most useful people, and we cannot thank and praise them enough." Because, Luther continued, "histories are nothing other than a demonstration, recollection, and sign of divine action and judgment, how God [using others] upholds, rules, obstructs, prospers, punishes, and honors the world, . . . each according to his just desert, evil or good."⁶ Histories are life lessons, a kind of cross-cultural experience that runs vertically through time. Those who ignore such lessons impoverish themselves, as seen in a remark credited to Goethe: "The person who cannot draw on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth."

But histories, while splendid, hardly stand in splendid isolation. Books in general are grand windows letting light flood in on our world. For French playwright Francis de Croisset, "Reading is the journey of those who cannot take the train." He was pro-reader, and so he meant no disrespect to those who traveled while being stay-at-homes. It's good he didn't, for one famous stay-at-home who journeyed far and wide via books was the intellectual Immanuel Kant. Actually Kant couldn't have ridden the rails anyway because not only did he die coincidentally nine days before the maiden run of the modern era steam train, but that train ran in Wales, and Kant never ventured more than a half-day's carriage ride from

*Books are grand windows
letting light flood in on our
world.*

his hometown Königsberg—born, lived, and died there in East Prussia. Yet he read voraciously, which allowed him to write on a wide range of topics. His theological ideas sometimes can give us fits, but his philosophical learning made him a kind of gatekeeper as the Enlightenment gave way to the nineteenth century. Reading took him farther than his carriage ever did.

The Preacher, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Croisset, Luther, and Kant are all long dead and gone, yet with their writings, we have the privilege—yes, privilege—of taking part in the Great Conversation. You cannot sit down with them over coffee, but you can meet through a book. Petrarch, father of Renaissance humanism (that is, a liberal arts revival from the fourteenth century) met Cicero that way and then wrote letters to the Latin poet who lived 1400 years earlier. Petrarch was not crazy. This was homage shown to one of the greats of classical antiquity, a giving of thanks for what Petrarch had learned, and an unabashed declaration that he felt himself to be a kindred spirit. Speaking for myself, I have no illusion about having the last word were I to talk to either of these men, giants in their time, and I would be pleased to have a seat not at the table but simply in the peanut gallery to listen in. Yet as more than one giant has remarked over time, the world is a sepulcher of indispensable men.⁷ So I guess the work is not done, and the Great Conversation is still on. Informed comments are welcome. Need something to bring to the table? Read a book.

Of course books are not much good if there is no way to manage them. Building a library is never easy, especially as books multiply. The Seminary staff juggled things during the renovation, moving most books off campus, then retrieving them as needed, and now finally putting everything back in its place, we hope. The library staff can tell you about their logistical challenges, but while they may disagree, I would say theirs was a walk in the park compared to building some libraries. One example: In 1601, a member of a prominent Naples family, Gian Vincenzo Pinelli, wanted to open a library for the people in the city in south Italy. Some 10,000 volumes were purchased at auction up in Milan and sent to Venice for transport. But the Venice city fathers held up the collection until they could comb through the books and confiscate materials they thought politically sensitive. Local workers also stole and sold some of the volumes. The rest were loaded on three ships and sent off through the Adriatic. Along the way, pirates captured one vessel, but when they discovered their booty was books, in a fit of rage they threw some of the crates overboard and took the crew. The abandoned ship then ran aground with the remainder of its cargo, and the locals were thrilled: books could be torn apart, and their covers and pages could be useful for patching leaks in their roofs, plugging cracks in their walls, and covering broken windowpanes. Some of these books were recovered and eventually made their way with the rest to Naples, but the library never came to be. The authorities there were not keen to make books available: who knows what ideas might stir up the people? Eventually the books went full circle, back to Milan where the Roman Catholic Cardinal Borromeo acquired them for his personal

collection.⁸ Such is an example of the perils and pitfalls of trying to have a library. (While our library building was shut for renovation, and books requested by faculty and students were being shuttled back and forth from storage out in the suburbs, the library personnel may have been vexed by rush-hour traffic, but they probably did not have to fend off pirates along the way.)

Despite horror stories, Renaissance learning sparked library growth. Of course, there were collections before, but they were not that large. I have more books on my Kindle than Thomas Aquinas had available in the medieval University of Paris library.⁹ With the advent of the Renaissance, noble families, wealthy businessmen, and universities actively pursued book collection and, if necessary, paid for them to be copied by hand.¹⁰ While the market was tight in those early years, Gutenberg changed things with movable type. As printing went from being *incunabula* (Latin for “in the cradle”) and started to walk, so to speak, along came the Reformation, the first post-Gutenberg revolution in Western culture. With a hot issue and product to help fuel the clash, printing broke into a sprint. Luther could point to others before him with similar ideas, but he was the one who had the technology at hand, and that made a difference. Historian Bernd Moeller once wrote, “No Humanism (that is, no liberal arts), no Reformation.”¹¹ Agreed. But we might offer a revision: “No Humanism, *no printing*, no Reformation.” Between 1517 and 1520, Luther turned out 30 different writings. We know printers produced 300,000 copies of those 30—an average of 10,000 copies per title. Try doing that by hand. Printers were essential to the broadcast of Reformation ideas.¹² Of course not all were fans of printing. Some humanist scholars were elitists and wanted to keep the learning from the masses and the artistic manuscripts to themselves. They warned that if paper books supplanted hand-written vellum pages (skins), learning would crumble when the paper crumbled. Apparently critics did not think about reprints. (Similar worries were heard when books began to be digitized: what happens when the platform changes, leaving files that no longer can be easily read, or what do we do when the media deteriorates?)

Although numbers pale compared to today, the relative flood of books in the Renaissance and Reformation democratized learning. Reformation territories won the race for literacy. Things started with at best 20–25 percent of the populace in large cities reading, and 5–10 percent in villages. Then came books about theology and others with just solid learning for life. For example, Luther published Aesop, basic wisdom anyone could use.¹³ Put useful advice before the people, put books in the hands of those whose self-image is boosted by the Reformation emphasis on vocation, and especially come with theological ideas that offer them comfort and peace, and watch what happens. By 1600 Europe-wide, there were about 345,000 separate editions or titles in print with around 180 million copies all told.¹⁴ Books were no longer objects of curiosity. They were essential to understanding and building a world. They changed the spread of information and also how people took it in, how they absorbed ideas, reading individually and reflecting internally—a democratizing of

learning and an opening up of the church.¹⁵

Yet even with floodgates open, books, libraries, and learning still had rough times. With more and cheaper books, individual scholars could build personal collections to rival some academic libraries, and because of that, schools balked at spending to add to their holdings. In the mid-sixteenth century both Oxford and Cambridge not only stopped buying, they actually sold their university libraries—the books and the furniture to boot. Books disappeared in other ways. In the Thirty Years War, the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus laid waste to many a German city, but his troops were ordered to pack up any library they found and ship the books back for the new Lutheran university in Uppsala.¹⁶ (Not quite interlibrary loan, but it does take the pressure off the book-buying budget.)

Along with real wars, there were theological battles over libraries and books. Ruling ecclesiastical authorities sometimes throttled ideas when they disapproved, purging school libraries of volumes deemed dangerous or heretical. Authorities decided what ought to be allowed, while academics, students, and the people were expected to fall in line. One famous clash saw Lutheran Reformer Polycarp Leyser tangle with Melchior Klesl, Archbishop of Vienna.¹⁷ Klesl insisted that rulers allow only tightly controlled Catholicism in Hungary, with approved books/education geared to reinforce. Klesl knew best: after all, he was the church authority, and the Catholic emperor surely would agree and back Klesl's ecclesiastical supervision. For his part, Leyser could more than hold his own as a champion of Lutheran orthodoxy. But while championing ideas was one thing, forcing them down people's throats was another. Leyser argued that the field should be open for the Hungarian laity, providing them books of all sorts from various sides, and then after they had studied, they would decide for themselves. Leyser had his convictions, but he also had confidence in books and diligent learning. He knew forced adherence "because I say so" was counterfeit.

Books and learning can be a messy business, turning our ideas and our world upside down. That can be uncomfortable and unsettling, even risky. It is tempting to pull back and look for a safe harbor elsewhere. Some circle the wagons to shut things out. Other people seek out and then latch on to what they see as a golden age. It could be the sixteenth-century Reformation, or the nineteenth in our own denominational history. Some perhaps wish we could freeze time, capture the

moment, and go no farther. Things will fall into place, problems will vanish, and the glory days will multiply. But people who, like Peter at the Transfiguration, would build booths to stay on the mountaintop often do not know much about the mountain, not to mention the

Books and learning can be a messy business, turning our ideas and our world upside down.



The interior of Duke Humphrey's Library, the oldest reading room of the Bodleian Library in the University of Oxford (Photo by DAVID ILIFF. License: CC-BY-SA 3.0).

rest of the land. While they would have a past they *think* they understand, a rude awakening awaits in, for example, David Lowenthal, who buries both fallacies and fantasies with his book *The Past Is a Foreign Country*.¹⁸ Lowenthal shows how different people were “back then,” how their thoughts and actions hardly square with what we assume them to be. Hindsight is not necessarily, or automatically, 20-20. It can just as easily be looking at (but not seeing) a distortion or a mirage. Twenty years after his first edition, Lowenthal agreed to put out a revision. He thought he simply could tweak the original for an update, but in the intervening years, so much had been added and altered to what had been known and how it was understood that he had to write an entirely new book: *The Past Is a Foreign Country—Revisited*.¹⁹ The golden age is feel-good myth, but it won't survive the view from the library.

You don't need a mountaintop for perspective. The second floor of Fuerbringer Hall will do. It's fine to appreciate the past and give thanks for one's heritage, but as St. Bernard of Clairvaux reminds us, "To possess what one knows nothing about, what glory can there be in that?"²⁰

For the moment before we go across the street for the ribbon cutting, we are in the chapel—an important place, no argument. But at a seminary—the Latin root means “seed bed” where ideas sprout and begin to grow—at a seminary one could make a genial argument that the place where you really do not want to start over is with that building across the street, the library and what all is in it. This campus was dedicated in 1926. There was money at the time for a chapel, but the Synod decided to wait on that and instead divide the funds among the Concordia prep schools.

(If you check those schools, you will find buildings dating from the mid-1920s.²¹)

From then and for roughly sixty-five years we held chapel in Wyneken Auditorium.

Not ideal, but consider the chapel designed in Torgau Castle for Luther's prince, Elector John Frederick: bare walls, clear windows, a simple altar and pulpit. By comparison, Wyneken Auditorium was baroque. After thirty-five years, the library here was bursting at its seams, and so we built and moved—and continued with chapel in the auditorium for three more decades. Shelby Foote, the historian with a southern drawl you might remember from Ken Burns's *Civil War* video series, said,

Rulers who read surely are more likely to govern better than those who don't or won't.

“a university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library.”²³ (We might amend that to say a seminary is built around a library and a chapel. People too.) Over the years, hard but probably right decisions

were made on what needed to be built when. Today we turn another corner. Einstein never learned his phone number. He said he could look it up. He also is reported to have said, “The only thing that you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library.”²⁴ (And you already know where this place is.)

It is worth knowing where the library is because of what is in it. The collection is an impressive resource. The “Library History” on the web page is worth noting, but here are two anecdotes from my own experience. For years, the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference was held annually on this campus, but eventually the conference outgrew the Seminary. When it met here, professors from elsewhere—good institutions—would come days early to use the library, and one of the complaints we got by moving elsewhere was they would miss their time with the books. Another story: Wolfenbüttel in Germany has a tremendous library started by the territory's dukes in the sixteenth century. Their premise: rulers who read surely are more likely to govern better than those who don't or won't. Today Wolfenbüttel's library has nearly a million volumes with about a fourth from the Reformation era and

close after. One summer while there I met a woman researching the Reformation's influence on family life, using pamphlets (*Flugschriften*) that were devotional and offered advice on the Christian home. To save time while there, she always checked bibliographies to see if she could get the same things in the States. Cheaper to work at home, of course, and so better to spend time with materials available only in Wolfenbüttel. The largest collection in the US was at Harvard—no surprise with some nine million books in Widner Library. The second largest: in the Concordia Seminary Library rare-book room.

Times have changed, libraries change. In Renaissance and Reformation days, they were anything but a quiet place. People studied, but they also came to talk, to discuss their work. But there were rules. From its founding to present day, Oxford's Bodleian library requires new users to read aloud and then sign this oath: "I hereby undertake not to remove from the Library, nor to mark, deface, or injure in any way, any volume, document or other object belonging to it or in its custody; not to bring into the Library, or kindle therein, any fire or flame, and not to smoke in the Library; and I promise to obey all rules of the Library."²⁵

That wording actually is updated. Originally smoking was allowed (as it also was in ours, at least in what used to be the lounge with the popular periodicals), but fire and books do not mix very well, so in older times libraries went unheated in winter, and the University of Oxford decided to follow suit. But people could still talk. The library as storehouse with a morgue-like silence comes in the nineteenth century. Before that libraries were places for research and then conversation, at times loud and lively as ideas were tested. Today we split the difference and make space for both talk and quiet. Still no open flames, but you can bring your lunch and get coffee. More, the nature of library resources has changed—it is not just paper books and periodicals in a digital age. Savings in some quarters are welcome, while costs in other areas have climbed, and libraries must figure out how best to marshal their funds. So we share resources with other places even as we play to specialties to multiply the effect. An information studies professor at Syracuse, R. David Lankes, had a good line for triage: "Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities."²⁶ Community—we have heard that word a time or two around this place.

When Luther quit law school and went into the monastery, he gave away his library, except for two books: copies of Plautus and Vergil, two Latin pagans, a playwright and a poet—not your usual reading for the cloister! In the years that followed, Luther did much to fill library shelves single-handedly and arguably had more influence not through the classroom but through things he wrote that people read.²⁷ While on his deathbed, the last thing Luther scribbled went back to classical authors again, to Vergil and Cicero. Book learning, said Luther, and life experience go hand in hand in a kind of dialogue, as honest study instills respect for the authors, the topic, and the text. In his last lines Luther put to paper, he referenced the Scriptures, calling them the "Divine Aeneid."²⁸ Vergil's Aeneid was the story of a journey as

Aeneas left the ruins of Troy and began a long passage filled with difficulties until he came to what eventually would become Rome. The other Aeneid, the Divine Aeneid, that is, the Bible, also tells the story of a journey, from Eden through countless difficulties until God brings it all to a close—that last chapter still to be written. “Lay not your hand on this Divine Aeneid,” Luther wrote, “but bow before it and adore its every trace.” So much is there to be had in books, especially that book. “Wenn zur Theologie kommt, eine gewisse *Bescheidenheit* gehört dazu” goes a line attributed to Luther. That is, “when it comes to theology, a certain modesty is called for.” *Bescheidenheit*, modesty—the posture to adopt and an attitude to maintain as we hold up our part of the Great Conversation.

There is a lot to read, a lot to talk about in the Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library. I hope that students (here four years or so) and the rest of us (for however much longer) beat a path to the door and do our part to try to wear the place out. For as a friend of libraries and books you know that “of the making of many books there is no end”—and that’s a good thing too.

Endnotes

- 1 T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), section 5, lines 866–869.
- 2 Luther’s classroom lectures, *Vorlesung über den Prediger Salomo*, 1526, were published as *Annotationes in Ecclesiasten, 1532*, and are found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1898), 20:1–203. [Hereafter cited as WA.] In English: *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 15:1–187. [Hereafter cited as LW.]
- 3 Young people sometimes take a year off between high school and college or college and career. It is not time wasted but time to look around, to understand, appreciate, learn, and ultimately be better prepared for life. In a sense we are in such a gap that falls between Christ’s ascension and promise to return and that second coming to usher in the kingdom in full in the new heaven and earth. The time spent in this world now—life in the First Article, so to speak—is not the end but rather life in the gap with time well spent when engaged, seeing and learning and growing.
- 4 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

- 1953; reprint by Routledge Revivals, 2016), 271.
- 5 A big concern of Kierkegaard's (in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, for example) is the problem of losing one's place, one's existential or relational tie to life in both present and past.
 - 6 Martin Luther, *Preface to Galeatus Capellae's History* (1536), trans. Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 34:276.
 - 7 All sorts of notable people have said something to that effect at different times in history, starting with Pericles, leader of Athens in its golden age. In a ceremony commemorating those who had given their lives in the Peloponnesian War, Pericles praised their sacrifice, even as life (actually the war) went on. In *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides includes "In Defense of Democracy," the oration by Pericles, and has Pericles saying, "The whole earth is the sepulcher of famous men; they are honored not only by columns and inscriptions in their own land, but in foreign nations on memorials graven not on stone but in the hearts and minds of men." So, yes, they contribute, but at the same time life goes on and time does not stand still. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (Amazon Digital Services, 2017), loc. 1652. The line or image—graveyards full of indispensable men—has been attributed to any number of people, ranging from Walter Winchell to Charles de Gaulle, both real and occasionally imagined. Not surprising, the short line teaches a lot. The Quote Investigator: "The Graveyards Are Full of Indispensable Men" <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/11/21/graveyards-full/#note-3015-17>.
 - 8 The story is told in detail in Andrew Pettegree, "The Renaissance Library and the Challenge of Print," in *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History*, ed. Alice Crawford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 72–91.
 - 9 In 1272 (Aquinas would die in 1274) a bequest of some 300 codices from Paris theologian Gerard of Abbeville, given upon his death, was thought probably to have doubled the size of the library, which continued to grow to just over 1,000 volumes in the two decades that followed. Richard H. Rouse, "The Early Library of the Sorbonne," *Scriptorium* 21 (1967): 42–71.
 - 10 When it came to copying books, questions and considerations had to be factored in. For example, a copy makes knowledge more available, but it also dilutes the value of the original codex, making it now only one of two rather than one of one and thus less valuable. Not just anyone should be turned loose with these things, and permission to look at someone's holdings often came via letters of introduction.
 - 11 Bernd Moeller, "The German Humanists and the Beginnings of the Reformation" in *Imperial Cities and the Reformation, Three Essays*, ed. and trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 19–38.
 - 12 Richard G. Cole, "The Dynamics of Printing in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, eds. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan Zophy (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1972), pp. 93–105. Cole, "Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 327–39.
 - 13 Carl P. E. Springer, *Luther's Aesop* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2011).
 - 14 Pettegree, "The Renaissance Library and the Challenge of Print," 80–81.
 - 15 The foundational study is Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). An abridged version is Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; 2nd ed. 2010). Also useful are Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Along with books, another tool for communicating ideas in a few words coupled with illustrations to reinforce and to speak to the still illiterate were broadsheets or placards. See Pettegree, *Broadsheets: Single-Sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Longer than broadsheets but much shorter than books was pamphlet literature—*Flugschriften*—authored by theologians but also by a wide range of educated people who wrote and read material both pro and con on the Reformation. One study is Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform: German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519–1530* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1955).
 - 16 Pettegree, "The Renaissance Library and the Challenge of Print," 87–88.

- 17 Bibliography on the controversy along with the basic arguments is in David P. Daniel, "Duellum Glöselianum: Literárny duel o náboženskej slobode v Uhorku zo začiatku 17. storočia" *Historické štúdie* 40 (1999): 151–158. The wider context of the Klesl/Leyser clash is in David P. Daniel, "The Fifteen Years War and the Protestant Response to Habsburg Absolutism in Hungary," *East Central Europe/L'Europe du Centre-est* 8, 1–2 (1981): 38–51. And Polycarp Leyser's side of the argument is in the tract (with a long title typical for that time) *Duellum Glöselianum. Das ist / Zwey unterschiedlicher und darzu wiederwertige Gedencken / uber der Frag / Ob den Hungrischen Landständen die Freyheit der Religion zu zulassen sey. Eines / Doctoris Melchioris Glöselij / Weihe Bischoffs zu Wien / und Administrators des Bisthumbs Newstade / welches Negtive streitet. Das ander / Doctoris Polycarpi Leisers / Churfürstlichen Hoffpredigers / und verordneten zu Kirchen un Schulsachen / Welches Affirmative scheuset. Christlicher guter Wolmeinung / zu fernerer Ergründung der unfeilbaren Göttlichen Warheit in den Druck verfertiget / durch M. Theophilum Philaethen Christopholitanum* (Leipzig: Abraham Lamberg, 1608). My thanks to friend and former Concordia Seminary colleague Dr. David P. Daniel for this bibliography on the Klesl-Leyser *Auseinandersetzung*. An interesting footnote to this footnote: Prof. Dr. Daniel was Concordia Seminary library director in the 1980s before moving to Slovakia and becoming the Professor of History on the Evangelical (that is, the Lutheran) Faculty at the University of Bratislava. When he left for Slovakia, I took his spot in the library, filling in as acting director for two years.
- 18 David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 19 David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country—Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 20 Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God" (De diligendo Deo), *Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 176.
- 21 I first grew up on the campus of St. Paul's College in Concordia, Missouri, where my father was on the faculty and my mother also taught at times. The mid-1920s building at SPC (as people called it at the time) was Kaeppel Gymnasium. Later SPC got a new and bigger gym, and Kaeppel was renovated, serving today as St. Paul's High School's chapel—a nice turn of events.
- 22 The stone slab altar is held up by four angels/legs, but they are white and so blend in. The pulpit on a side wall is decorated with Cranach artwork, but it also is understated compared to Cranach's work found in other churches. Luther dedicated the space in October 1544.
- 23 Foote's comment is cited in *North Carolina Libraries* 51–54 (1993): 162.
- 24 The Einstein comment shows up in various collections of quotable quotes, but without a bibliographical source. The remark about the library is similar to "you don't have to know everything; you just have to know where to find it," which is another good line but also not referenced. There are other similar expressions. In 1921 when asked what the speed of sound was, Einstein replied that he did not carry such information in his head since he could find it in textbooks. Stories are told of his notoriously porous memory for simple facts, including his phone number. "Einstein Sees Boston; Fails on Edison Test: Asked to Tell Speed of Sound He Refers Questioner to Text Books," *Special to the New York Times*, May 18, 1921, pg. 15.
- 25 The easiest place to find the pledge is in *Wikipedia* in the "Bodleian Library" entry.
- 26 R. David Lankes, "The Bad, the Good, and the Great," Keynote Address for Academic Librarians, Syracuse, NY, 2012.
- 27 The Luther output is not simply a matter of what he wrote but since the Reformation also a matter of what has been produced about him. It has been said that more has been written about Martin Luther than about any other figure in human history save for Jesus Christ.
- 28 "No one who has not been a shepherd or a peasant for five years can understand Vergil in his *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. I maintain that no one can understand Cicero in his letters unless he has been involved in efforts to govern the state for twenty years. And let no one who has not guided congregations with the prophets for a hundred years believe he has tasted Holy Scripture thoroughly. Because of this the miracle is tremendous in John the Baptist, in Christ, and in the Apostles. Lay not your hand on this divine Aeneid, but bow before it and adore its every trace. We are beggars. This is true!" WA—Tischreden 5: 318. LW 54: 476.

Inclined to Boast Social Media and Self-Justification

A. Trevor Sutton



A. Trevor Sutton is a PhD student at Concordia Seminary and associate pastor at St. Luke Lutheran Church in

Lansing, Michigan. Sutton and Dr. Gene E. Veith are co-authors of the book *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World* (Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

Two billion people have an active Facebook account.¹ This means that a quarter of the world's population uses this social media platform. To put this figure in perspective, roughly the same number of people living in the world today do not have access to basic sanitation facilities such as a toilet or latrine.²

In slightly more than a decade, this digital leviathan has gone from its nascent form as an isolated Harvard University website—TheFacebook—to a ubiquitous mainstay of daily life. This social media platform has had a powerful influence on modern understandings of friendship, privacy, and media practices. It has been at the center of recent debates over democracy, censorship, and “fake news.” It is not an overstatement to claim that the world has changed forever because of social media in general and Facebook in particular.

The steady rise of Facebook has deepened the need for theological reflection regarding social media. With a quarter of the world's population now using this technology, it is entirely necessary and salient for theologians to engage topics such as new media, technological determinism, and human–computer interaction. This is not simply an attempt to be culturally relevant or trendy; rather, putting theology in conversation with these topics is a pastoral care issue.

Martin Luther understood theology as being inexorably linked to pastoral care—“*Pro re theologica et salute fratrum*”³—and knew the importance of being conversant with the lives of ordinary people. Like Luther, the contemporary Lutheran scholar Mark Mattes describes theology as, “the art of discerning how to deliver

It is vital for pastors and theologians to discern how to deliver the promise in a digital age.

the promise.”⁴ New media is rapidly transforming the world the way Gutenberg’s printing press did over five hundred years ago. Exploring the theological dynamics of social media and digital technology is an urgent matter of pastoral care. It is vital for pastors and theologians to discern how

to deliver the promise in a digital age.

How might Lutheran theology go about engaging in conversation with new media and digital technology? As with any dialogue, a *locus communis* must be established in order for conversation to occur; this article argues that justification (namely the human pursuit of self-justification) provides that entry. To narrow the scope of analysis, this article will focus on a discrete feature of Facebook’s platform: the one-click “Like.” This exchange—giving and receiving a “Like” on Facebook—is emblematic of our modern pursuit for self-justification. The goal of this discussion is to help pastors and theologians provide pastoral care in a digital age.

Justification in a Secular Society

Just as Facebook is ubiquitous to modern daily life, justification is a ubiquitous doctrine within Lutheran theology. The threads of the internet weave the modern world together; similarly, justification by grace alone through faith alone weaves Lutheran theology together. Luther makes it clear: “For if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christin doctrine is lost.”⁵ The centrality of this doctrine makes it an ideal topic to put in conversation with new media and technology. Justification is not a fleeting fancy or trendy topic within Lutheran theology. It was a central issue in the Reformation and it continues to be a central topic today.

The focus of justification during the Reformation was primarily about one’s vertical relationship with God (*coram deo*). Luther’s discovery of the gospel, arguably the spark that ignited the Reformation, was concerned with this vertical relationship with God. The issue at hand was whether human righteousness is internally produced (*justitia propria*) or externally conferred (*justitia aliena*). As Luther and other reformers made clear, righteousness before God is a passive righteousness from outside oneself based on grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone.

The imminence of death in the Middle Ages gave a greater exigency to one’s vertical relationship with God. Millions of Europe’s population died of the bubonic plague, or Black Death.⁶ The ever-present reality of death put being in right relationship with God at the forefront of pastoral care.⁷ Medieval theology, according to historian Steven Ozment, focused heavily on one’s vertical relationship with God in preparation for death: “For medieval theologians the present life remained an anxious pilgrimage; man lived in unresolved suspense, fearing damnation and hoping

for salvation, ever in need of confession and indulgence, discipline and consolation, saintly intercession and the self-help of good works.”⁸

The world, however, has changed dramatically since the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Global pandemics, while still cause for fear, are not at the forefront of daily life in the industrialized world. Life expectancy has steadily improved over the last 500 years. Standards of living in many parts of the world have also increased. Death is not a daily fear for most people in modern industrialized nations; the vast majority of people in developed nations begin each week assuming that they will survive to see the weekend. This deferment of death has diminished the urgency of the vertical realm and produced a greater regard for the horizontal realm. Contemporary culture says there is plenty of life standing between now and eventual death; being in right relationship with the world is far more pressing than being in right relationship with God.

Yet, justification continues to be a concern for people in the modern world. Even secular culture is preoccupied with justification, justice, being declared just and right. However, modern concerns about justification are less focused on being in right relationship with God (*coram deo*) and far more focused on being in right relationship with other people (*coram mundo*). Self-justification in the Late Middle Ages was about producing good works that one might offer to God in order to be deemed righteous; self-justification in the modern age is about producing good works that one might offer to oneself or the world in order to be deemed righteous.⁹ The human desire to seek righteousness apart from divine grace, as described by Ted Peters, is the disease of self-justification: “Whether we refer to it as works or merit, self-justification is the human effort to define oneself or one’s social network as just, righteous, good, and deserving. To self-justify is to define oneself as just.”¹⁰

John Barclay, New Testament scholar at the University of Durham, suggests that this modern fixation with self-justification is increasingly manifest and prevalent on social media:

In an age when people fear the judgement of their peers far more than the judgment of God, we have become increasingly petulant, critical, even cruel and it’s proving hard to take... Our contemporaries are not now primarily trying to win the favor of God; they are trying to win the favor of one another. The judgement they fear is not the last judgement, but humiliating comments on social media.¹¹

The arrival of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s enabled this pursuit of self-justification to flourish. Collecting “Likes” and “Favorites” is one emerging, perhaps even predominant, way people confirm their righteousness. New media and designed technologies are at the forefront of individual user-experience, enabling and expediting the human pursuit of self-justification.

Technology & Technological Determinism

Technology is popularly depicted as modern inventions and futuristic gadgets. These depictions limit technology to new or innovative developments born out of science. In order for something to be considered technology, then it must be a modern creation or adaptation. However, this understanding overlooks the many manifestations of technology that exist in society today: writing, architecture, doors, walls, and automobiles. Although these are not modern inventions, many scholars regard these as manifestations of technology.¹²

It is important to note, however, that technology is not limited to just physical artifacts. While there are many scholars who define technology in narrow ways that can limit it to physical things,¹³ many others argue that technology can include not only what does the work but also the work itself. Rhetoric scholar Angela Haas puts it this way: “It is critical that we interrogate the tension between technology as things, technology as work, and technology in relation to multiple and diverse actors when we grapple with the technicalities of technology.”¹⁴

Haas’ definition means that technology is not confined narrowly to the world of things; instead, technology can include forms of making and doing. Technology encompasses the entire domain of *techné* that is both physical and non-physical. For instance, a technology might include language¹⁵ as a means by which one parses reality, artificial intelligence that merges data and language, or various forms of new media that are not so obviously physical.

It is important to note that understandings of technology must always include humans. Design scholar Richard Buchanan argues for this when he writes,

However, as important as science is in the development of technology, the activity of technological reasoning inherently involves human values selected knowingly or unknowingly as important premises that directly affect the essential characteristic of objects, not just their superficial appearance. . . . Its success is not judged theoretically by appealing to the knowledge of a small group of experts, but practically by appealing to the interests, attitudes, opinions, and values of users.¹⁶

Technology is intimately connected to the interests, attitudes, and values of users. In this regard, technology is always user-centered. Technology may exert a power and influence on users. And technology may or may not be designed with the help of users. However, technology never exists apart from users; technology always exists in relation to users. Discussions of technology must always recognize human users: the ways in which technology is shaped by users, acts upon users, and is acted on by users.

Technology is shaped by humans, and technology shapes humans. Robert Johnson, in his book *User-Centered Technology: A Rhetorical Theory for Computers and other Mundane Artifacts*, writes, “Technology helps shape the discursive and material

characteristics of cultures. As technologies emerge and are incorporated into a cultural context they alter not just the immediate activity for which they were designed but also have ‘ripple effects’ that shape culture in defining ways.”¹⁷ Johnson’s words capture the basic idea behind technological determinism.

Heavily influenced by phenomenology and Edmund Husserl’s call to explore the things themselves, technological determinism examines the ways in which technology determines the structure and values of a society. This theory sees technology as a powerful actor in daily life. Far from an inert object passively waiting for an actor to arrive and determine how best to use it, technological determinism understands technology as being a powerful actor networked amongst other actors, both human and non-human. Adherents to this theory understand technologies as benefiting some and not others, exerting some sort of force, creating an order, and determining human behavior. Technology is never passive, inactive, or neutral; it is always inclining users toward a certain action, value, or political arrangement.

Technological determinists often use the example of Robert Moses to prove that technology structures societal interactions. Moses, a city planner in New York City during the mid-twentieth century, designed and built bridges over the parkways on Long Island with extremely low clearance. These low bridges inhibited busses from accessing Long Island and thereby kept users of mass transit from using certain parks in the area. This technology, according to Jennifer Slack and Macgregor Wise, was deliberately designed to “hinder poor people and blacks, not only from using the parkways, but also from accessing Jones Beach, a park Moses designed. In this case, the task delegated to the technology was in part that of racial and class discrimination.”¹⁸ The bridges and overpasses, though not often regarded as technologies, determined who was and was not able to access Jones Beach.

Within the theory of technological determinism, there are variants for arguing which technology exerts power on society. Regardless of where one is on the spectrum of technological determinism, this theory investigates the locus of interaction that exists when technology and users meet. The question is not whether technology shapes our lives; rather, the question is how and to what extent technology shapes our lives.¹⁹

Proponents of technological determinism call attention to the consequences of technology. Rather than engaging in an uncritical understanding of technology, technological determinists call for recognizing the ways in which, “products have persistent consequences in the behavior of human beings, whether we consider a product’s style or its deeper synthesis of technological reasoning.”²⁰ A thorough examination of technology calls for more than just a surface observation of its features and functions; recognizing the furtive influence of technology on human behavior is vitally important.

The central questions of this article can now be addressed: In what ways do the technologies we encounter on social media scaffold our experience and determine how we interact with others online? How do particular technologies within social

media (such as the like button, the share button, and comment features) determine our behaviors in these spaces? And, most importantly, how does social media incline us to engage in self-justification *through* and *with* social media?

Self-Justification through the One-Click “Like” Affordance

Luther described the human penchant for sin as incessantly building a case for our own righteousness while rejoicing in the deficiencies of others: “But the carnal nature of man violently rebels, for it greatly delights in punishment, in boasting of its own righteousness, and in its neighbor’s shame and embarrassment at his own unrighteousness. Therefore it pleads its own case, and it rejoices that this is better than its neighbor’s.”²¹

Oswald Bayer echoes Luther’s assessment of the human condition. Bayer describes humanity as being utterly fixated on justification: “To be recognized and justified; to cause ourselves to be justified or to justify ourselves in attitude, thought, word, and action; to need to justify our being; or simply to be allowed to exist without needing to justify our being—all this makes for our happiness or unhappiness and it an essential part of our humanity.”²² Bayer argues that there is an inner longing within all people to be justified and deemed righteous; desiring justification is a central part of the human experience.

It is no stretch, therefore, to assume that the tools and technologies humans design might facilitate this justification. Scholars have argued that humans seldom interact with the world apart from tools and technology.²³ Instead of interacting directly with the world, we create artifacts to mediate our external activities. These tools range from ancient technologies such as hammers and shovels to more recent technologies such as smartphones and social media. These tools are designed by humans, for humans, to help humans. It is important, therefore, that theologians interrogate the tools and technologies used for self-justification.

User-centered design, as the name suggests, advocates for designing with end users in mind. Donald Norman, a formative figure in modern design studies, has recognized the ways in which designers actually seek to facilitate human sinfulness through their designs. In the foreword to a book by Chris Nodder, *Evil by Design: Interaction Design Leads Us into Temptation*, Norman writes, “But why should design be based on evil? Simple: Starting with evil means starting with real human behavior. . . . And good design results from good understanding.”²⁴ Norman’s point is simple: Good design understands users and thus it must also consider the depravity of users.

As Norman suggests, Nodder’s entire book argues that human sinfulness ought to be accounted for and perhaps even exploited. Designing for the digital age requires, according to Nodder, designers to ask, “How do we influence behavior through the medium of software?”²⁵ These “evil” design characteristics are often furtive and hidden from plain sight.²⁶ In fact, that is what makes for good design.

Other scholars have made similar arguments about the furtive power of digital



interfaces. According to Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe, digital interfaces have a powerful influence on users:

Within the virtual space represented by these interfaces, and elsewhere within computer systems, the values of our culture—ideological, political, economic, education—are mapped both implicitly and explicitly, constituting a complex set of material relations among culture, technology, and technology users. In effect, interfaces are cultural maps of computer systems . . . such maps are never ideologically innocent or inert.²⁷

Selfe and Selfe argue that it is naïve to think that designed interfaces are free from bias or partiality. Instead, these digital interfaces incline us to think, behave, and function in a certain manner.

Human users, being broken and sinful creatures, are inclined toward boasting in their own self-righteousness and building a case for their own self-worth. User-centered design strives to understand real human behavior and design with this in

mind. Social media is a designed technology intended to maximize user experience and enjoyment. Therefore, this technology has been designed—at worst, furtively, or at best, unintentionally—in such a way as to facilitate our sinful penchant for self-justification and boasting. The Like button on Facebook is not there by accident. The Like button is there because of our deep longing to be liked by others, celebrated for our accomplishments, and deemed righteous in the horizontal realm. This affordance was designed, wittingly or unwittingly, with this kind of user in mind.²⁸

The one-click affordance of the Like button on Facebook is a good example of technology designed for self-justification: it provides visible confirmation and affirmation from other users. Users post a picture or text while other users are able to like what has been posted. The amount of likes a post receives is visible to other users. The Facebook platform is a public forum for determining what is deemed good, right, and salutary by other users.

Scholars have studied the ways in which Facebook in general, and the one-click Like affordance in particular, impact users' well-being. For instance, a group of psychologists has determined that, while ostensibly being a place for communal interaction, Facebook use can have a negative impact on one's sense of well-being: "Rather than enhancing well-being . . . the current findings demonstrate that interacting with Facebook may predict the opposite result for young adults—it may undermine it." The decline in user well-being was both moment-to-moment and over time.

The results of this study spurred further investigation of the relationship between Facebook and user well-being. Another study parsed various kinds of communication within Facebook and determined that impersonal gestures such as the one-click Like did little to promote user well-being "while receiving personalized, effortful communication from close friends was linked to improvements in well-being."³⁰

Along with influencing well-being, researchers have also explored the ways in which Facebook influences users' behavior and actions. German researchers have found that spending time on social networking sites can trigger strong feelings of envy. The researchers found that, "passive following triggers invidious emotions, with users mainly envying the happiness of others . . ."³¹ Interestingly, the researchers found that users developed methods for dealing with their feelings of envy:

As part of their envy-coping plan, some users may engage in even greater self-promotion and impression management. . . . this behavior can trigger the phenomenon we denoted as the self-promotion–envy spiral, with users reacting with even more self-promotion content to the self-promotion of others. As a result, envy-ridden character of the platform climate can become even more pronounced.³²

According to these researchers, this technology is far from a passive actor

awaiting the influence of a human user; rather, the Facebook platform is actively scaffolding users' experiences and interactions in a particular way. This technology, as technological determinism predicts, is actively inclining users toward feelings of envy and behaviors of self-promotion.

All of these studies, and others like them, reveal how Facebook is largely anemic when it comes to providing real and meaningful well-being. To be certain, Facebook can be used in ways that promote well-being. Nevertheless, these studies offer a sobering reminder that social media engagement can often have exactly the opposite outcome. Social media users come to these platforms hoping to have increased connection with others and an improved sense of well-being; instead, they frequently leave feeling alienated, envious, and experiencing diminished well-being.

Facebook, as long as it is used as a vehicle for proving ourselves righteous, will always be ineffective. Seeking righteousness—*coram deo* or *coram mundo*—on social media will lead to despair. Any attempt at our own self-justification will come up wanting: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8–9). Lutheran theology can offer a helpful response.

Grace in a Web 2.0 World

Thesis 28 of the Heidelberg Disputations states, “The love of God does not find, but creates, what is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through what is pleasing to it.”³³ Though written five hundred years ago, these words are salient for our Web 2.0 world. Social media invites us to find that which is pleasing. We like good pictures, tweets with which we agree, and shared articles that affirm our views. These platforms are a virtual exchange of human love; people seek, find, and confirm their love of self and others. In order for human love to exist, however, that which is loved must be pleasing. These online spaces invite us to endlessly prove that we are in fact loveable. Pleasing the unpleasable, however, is a fruitless endeavor that will inevitably lead to despair.

The love of God is different. God does not find something loveable; rather, God creates that which is loveable. The message of the gospel is exactly this: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6–8). The righteousness of Christ is a gift that is given—not earned—simply by the grace of God. Our *coram deo* righteousness is passively bestowed upon us through faith in Christ Jesus. Before God, our standing is not based on the sum

Pastoral care in the digital age requires us to examine both the objects of technology and how they are situated in society.

total of our likes, favorites, or retweets. According to John Barclay, the gospel has the power to upend conventional standards of worth and restructure social interaction: “It is the incongruous grace that Paul traces in the Christ-event and experiences in the Gentile mission that is the explosive force that demolishes old criteria of worth and clears space for innovative communities that inaugurate new patterns of social existence.”³⁴

Pastoral care in the digital age must help people to never forget the unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. As people spend hours each day on social media platforms, they will undoubtedly be shaped by these technologies. The ubiquitous nature of social media will make it ever harder to maintain the truth that the love of God creates that which is pleasing. Increasingly, social media will convince us all that love finds that which is pleasing. The future work of seelsorger will include helping people find their worth in Christ Jesus alone rather than amassing likes, favorite, and retweets. Pastors will be called upon to help people untangle the cords of self-justification that have ensnared them in despair and alienation. The kingdom of God is markedly different from the kingdom of Facebook.

Pastoral care in the digital age also involves guiding people toward constructive engagement with social media. Since research has shown that personalized communication (i.e., direct messages) can promote well-being, this sort of engagement should be encouraged over impersonal communication (i.e., the Like one-click affordance). Furthermore, pastors should help people think through the ways in which their own social media usage can either incite or abate feelings of envy within others: Might this post trigger the “self-promotion–envy spiral” within someone else? These are only two of many ways in which the redeemed can use social media in constructive and beneficial ways.

Theologians must attend to the ways in which this digital technology is shaping our culture, practices, and lives. Richard Buchanan says that those in the humanities (though theologians could also take note) often settle for superficial critiques of emerging technology “without closely examining how technological innovations come to be or how they are transformed into the products that influence our lives.”³⁵ It is vitally important for pastors and theologians to develop thoughtful understandings and critiques when it comes to new media. Dismissing new media as unimportant or inconsequential could be catastrophic to the future of pastoral care.

Technology is always *in situ*. That is to say, technology must always be considered in relation to its situation, context, and users. Pastoral care in the digital age requires us to examine both the objects of technology and how they are situated in society. Langdon Winner, a formidable technology scholar, explains the need to study technology as it is deployed in the world: “My belief that we ought to attend more closely to technical objects themselves is not to say that we can ignore the contexts in which those objects are situated. A ship at sea may well require, as Plato and Engels insisted, a single captain and obedient crew. But a ship out of service, parked at the

dock, needs only a caretaker.”³⁶ Facebook, in and of itself, may be an inconsequential technology for pastors and theologians. Facebook, as it is deployed in the world and used by billions of people, is massively important for pastors and theologians.

If two billion Facebook users are not enough to merit theological inquiry, the impending flood of new media ought to catch our attention. In a letter written to his son in 1945, J. R. R. Tolkien wrote prophetic words about the increasing power of technology. Pastors and theologians would be wise to heed Tolkien’s words both now and in the future: “As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class, the Machines are going to be enormously more powerful. What’s their next move?”³⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, announced this on June 27, 2017.
- 2 According to the World Health Organization, 2.3 billion people do not have basic sanitation facilities such as toilets or latrines: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs392/en/>
- 3 “For theology and the salvation of the brethren.” LW: 48:23–26.
- 4 Mark Mattes, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 3.
- 5 LW 26:9
- 6 Steve Ozment, *The Age of Reform: 1250–1550* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1980), 8.

- 7 Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narrative as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 169.
- 8 Ozment, 374.
- 9 Oswald Bayer has written extensively on the modern fixation with self-justification. For example, Bayer discusses this topic in his book, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Quarterly Books, 2003).
- 10 Ted Peters, "Justice, Justification, and Self-Justification" *Theology Today* 72 no. 4 (2016): 359–378.
- 11 John Barclay, "Lecture at Concordia Seminary: Paul, Grace, and Human Worth" (Tuesday, April 4, 2017).
- 12 Cf. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2002), 81. "Yet writing (and especially alphabetic writing) is a technology, calling for the use of tools and other equipment: styli or brushes or pens, carefully prepared surfaces such as paper, animal skins, strips of wood, as well as inks or paints, and much more."
- 13 Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus*, 109 no. 1 (1980): 123.
- 14 Angela Haas, "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Technical Communication, Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy" *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 26 no. 3 (July 2012): 289.
- 15 NB Plato's Phaedrus Dialogue.
- 16 Richard Buchanan, "Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice" *Design Issues* 2 no. 1 (1985): 19.
- 17 Robert Johnson, *User-Centered Technology: A Rhetorical Theory for Computers and other Mundane Artifacts* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998): 89.
- 18 Jennifer Slack and Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 204–205.
- 19 Robert Johnson, 88.
- 20 Richard Buchanan, "Design and the New Rhetoric." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 no. 3 (2001): 194.
- 21 LW 31:304.
- 22 Bayer, 2.
- 23 Victor Kaptelinin and Bonnie Nardi, *Acting with Technology: Activity Theory and Interaction Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006): 42.
- 24 Chris Nodder, *Evil by Design: Interaction Design to Lead Us into Temptation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013): 6.
- 25 Ibid., 9.
- 26 Ibid., 9.
- 27 Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe, "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones." *College Composition and Communication* 45 no. 4 (1994): 485.
- 28 Nodde, 9.
- 29 Ethan Kross, Philippe Verduyn, Emre Demiralp, Jiyoung Park, David Seungjae Lee, Natalie Lin, Holly Shablack, John Jonides, Oscar Ybarra "Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults." *PLOS One* 8 no. 8 (2013): 5.
- 30 Moira Burke and Robert E. Kraut "The Relationship Between Facebook Use and Well-Being Depends on Communication Type and Tie Strength." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 21 (2016): 279.
- 31 Hannah Krasnova, Helena Wenninger, Thomas Widjaja, and Peter Buxmann. "Envy on Facebook: A Hidden Threat to Users' Life Satisfaction?" 11th International Conference on Wirtschaftsinformatik. 27 February 2013: 13.
- 32 Ibid., 12.
- 33 Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation - Thesis 28.
- 34 John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 498–499.
- 35 Richard Buchanan. "Design and the New Rhetoric" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 no. 3 (2001) 185.
- 36 Winner, 135.
- 37 J. R. R. Tolkien. "Letter #96: To Christopher Tolkien." January 30, 1945.

Two Responses to Joel Okamoto's “When Salt Loses Its Saltiness”

This past issue of *Concordia Journal* features an article by Joel Okamoto, “When Salt Loses Its Saltiness: Nihilism and the Contemporary Church” (Fall 2018, 33–49). His essay on what he calls “normal nihilism” is not the usual cultural analysis that points out the various trends that threaten Christianity. While helpful, these kinds of analyses tend to look at ways of thought and life *external* to the church. “Individualism,” “secularism,” and “materialism” are some of the most prominent, especially because they also threaten to infiltrate and influence the church and, to some extent, have already done so. But Okamoto recognizes these cultural threats as *symptoms* of the much deeper and pervasive cultural condition of *nihilism*. Okamoto’s careful description and explanation of Nietzsche’s diagnosis seeks to demonstrate how nihilism has become the “new normal” for modern Christians and non-Christians alike. As an *objective social condition*, “we are at home in nihilism,” so much so that we don’t even notice it, like the soft hum of forced air in a house or the nighttime urban glow that prevents us from seeing our own galaxy.

The upshot is that the formerly unexpressed assumptions about God as the truth of our universe, our life, and our society are no longer assumed. And because they must now be expressed as various propositions to be critiqued or defended, they no longer function *de facto* as the world-conceiving, value-shaping foundation they once were. They are merely one of many strongly held beliefs in the marketplace of ideas. So it is that western Christians simply *cannot* talk about God in the same way as before—they must give a reason for belief, and yet precisely because they must do so, talk of God has changed fundamentally. God no longer *functions*, even for Christians, *as the light by which we see everything else*. As philosopher James Edwards states, “Nihilism is now the way the world comes to us, the way it sounds itself out in us; it is the way we comport ourselves to what we are given. We are all now nihilists” (Okamoto, 42).

We may be tempted to pass over all of this too quickly and start proposing

solutions via apologetics or witness strategies, but this would be mistake. Rather, we should slow down and consider how such strategies, especially when uncritically adopted, often make matters worse, undercutting what we really want to say about God, or better, what the Scriptures say to us about God. “Christians now need not only to identify their god . . . but also to explain the very idea of God. . . . Salvation can no longer be taken for granted as the ultimate aim. Christians now need to explain why they think saving even should matter” (Okamoto, 43). This warning extends to both Christians who try to accommodate their message to be more palatable to the modern person and to Christians who dig in their heels and repeat traditional dogmas even if they can no longer explain or communicate their importance.

The way forward that Okamoto’s diagnosis offers, requires us to think through how the Christian life relates to its claims and how we must intentionally cast its claims as comprehensive accounts. As C. S. Lewis put it, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (from “Is Theology Poetry?”). Thus, we do not worship Jesus because he “helps me get through the week” or because he has established an institution with aesthetically pleasing vestments, architecture, and ceremonies. We worship Jesus because he is the revelation of the God of all creation, the Son of God who has risen from the dead and thereby rules all things. Christians worship God as falling objects worship gravity.

The following reactions to Okamoto’s essays are examples of what taking our “new normal” seriously might look like. Both essayists are not proposing brand new strategies or activities; rather, they are asking us first to conceive of our activities differently. Michael Zeigler argues that Christian community is not merely an outreach strategy, a narrow means to another end, but a way of life that needs to pervade the entirety of our social interactions. Likewise, Peter Nafzger asks preachers to think about their task in broader, indeed cosmic terms. Not a TED talk, a pep rally for piety, or a ritual act, preaching should be aimed at giving Christians the world that God’s word describes and offers. Such “worldmaking” preaching includes calling the hearers to leave behind the worlds that they or others have conceived for themselves, the *metanoia* that the Lord Jesus willed to be the entire life of the believer (cf. Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses!). Both essays offer one example of how one might address our “new normal,” by a reevaluation of what we do and why we do it.

Erik Herrmann

Picking up the Pieces

A Response to Nihilism

Michael Zeigler



Michael Zeigler serves as the Speaker of The Lutheran Hour, the world's longest running Christ-centered radio

broadcast. He has served as a pastor and continues to work as an adjunct instructor for Concordia Seminary and as an Air Force Reserve aircraft maintenance officer.

I have a puzzle for you. It's implicitly related to the conundrum of normal nihilism which Joel Okamoto outlined in the prior article. There are four pieces to this puzzle:

1. A group of six Anglo-Saxon men, whose average age is 62.8;
2. A young African-American woman with five children in her care;
1. A dozen boxes filled with multicolored quilts ready to be shipped to Africa for a Lutheran Women's Missionary League World Relief project; and
2. A 14-year-old girl with a dislocated, black-and-blue elbow.

How could these puzzle pieces come together in a single evening?

A Third Place

It is the night of October 19, 2017. Six members of the local Lutheran church's "Man Cave" fellowship gather to share food, visit, and listen to a presentation on "skills every man should acquire." Tonight's topic is on being a sharp-dressed man. A couple of hours earlier, a woman drives by the church sign and read, "Man Cave Here, tonight, 7 pm: food, darts, brotherhood." She is on her way to pick up her two daughters at the public school on the adjoining block. Next, she will be picking up her three nephews and watching them for the night.

Last year, she and her daughters came to this church's community nights. There was an informal dinner and the girls participated in chess and sport stacking classes. She sees the sign and decides to bring the kids over later to check it out. It's a safe place for her family. Whatever "Man Cave" means, she knows they will be welcome there.

Should our congregations think of their facilities as third places for their neighborhoods?

Around the same time, other members of the church arrange to pick up dozens of quilts and blankets for a mission project. They have coordinated with the men of the Man Cave to help carry the boxes to their car. As the boxed quilts wait to be loaded, a young gymnast at a nearby gym approaches

the uneven bars to practice her routine.

The men begin their presentation on how to make a suit work for you, not against you. They hear children's voices coming down the stairs. One man goes to investigate. He recognizes the woman and the children from last year's community-night dinners. The men realize there may have been a misunderstanding about the target audience for the night's event. They decide to defer the talk on how to coordinate your socks with your slacks. They break out a chessboard and a few sport stacking sets and invite the children to share some snacks. Man Cave continues with a slight detour.

Minutes later, the mission project coordinators arrive. It's time to move the boxes. The men, the five children, and their mom make short work of it. With the help of this ad hoc mission crew, the quilts have officially begun their journey overseas.

It's now 8:30 p.m. The men clean the church kitchen. One gets an urgent phone call. His eldest daughter has fallen from the uneven bars and is badly hurt. A friend from Man Cave gives him a ride to the gym where the ambulance is arriving. Anticipating a night in the hospital with his wife and injured daughter, he arranges for his three younger children to stay with his friend's family until the following morning. It is the first time they've spent the night anywhere without their parents.

How did this puzzle come together? The answer is in what sociologist Ray Oldenburg has called a "third place."¹ It's a gathering spot between work and home. It's where unrelated people come to relate, build social capital, and offer mutual aid. America has too few of these third places. Suburban sprawl, long commutes, and high-speed, digital home entertainment are all part of the problem. Go ahead and add informal public life to normal nihilism's list of casualties.

Slow Solutions

Should our congregations think of their facilities as third places for their neighborhoods? I think so. The gospel is a slow solution and the best way to spread a slow solution is through long-term, social interaction. Let me explain a "slow solution."

In a 2013 article, Atul Gawande explored why some medical solutions take off quickly, while others stall.² Anesthesia is an example of a fast solution. It spread quickly because the problem (pain during surgery) was obvious and the solution was

comfortable. Anesthesia made surgery a more tolerable experience for both patient and surgeon.

In contrast, warming a newborn through skin-to-skin contact with the mother is an example of slow solution. Kangaroo care, as it's called, is a proven practice for preventing infant death due to hypothermia in countries without reliable electricity to power incubators. Even though the practice is effective, it has not taken off quickly. This is because the problem is hidden, and the solution is slightly uncomfortable. It's hidden because, without an accurate thermometer, there's no perceptible difference between one infant suffering from hypothermia and another who is not. In many cases, the infant's low body temperature doesn't cause problems until days later. The immediate cause of death may be pneumonia, but the root cause was hypothermia.

Another factor that makes kangaroo care a slow-to-take-off solution is that it's somewhat uncomfortable. When a mother gives birth in a facility without reliable heating, she's often cold and doesn't object when attendants swaddle the baby separately. A family member holds the baby, and no one notices the baby's temperature is dropping.

Gawande observes, "This has been the pattern of many important but stalled ideas. They attack problems that are big, but to most people, invisible; and making them work can be tedious, if not outright painful."³ They go against convention. There is no immediate reward for implementing them and no obvious consequence for not.

In some sense, calling upon the Lord (Rom 10:13) has always been a slow solution. It's uncomfortable because dealing with church people is often painful (see 1 Corinthians). Plus, calling on Jesus may not bring an immediate reward. People who don't call on Jesus do just fine. Separation

from God leading to eternal condemnation isn't exactly an "in your face" kind of problem. This is especially the case when there are many worldviews that present themselves as soluble. Competition of worldviews, as Okamoto explains, is our objective social condition. This makes the gospel solution less conventional. In an age of normal nihilism, the gospel is like kangaroo care. Subjectively speaking, it's a slow solution.

How do you spread a slow solution? In the medical field, Gawande found that the best way was to build trust through long-term, face-to-face, social interaction. "People talking to people is still how the world's standards change."⁴ This should be an obvious answer for us who confess the word of God "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14), and then sent followers to be his representatives to confront and forgive sinners (Jn 20:21–23).

Competition of worldviews, as Okamoto explains, is our objective social condition.

If there were a time when the Christian worldview seemed conventional, Christians would have had fewer reasons for expecting the gospel to be a slow solution. But that time is past.

Gestation

Later, I had the opportunity to interview that mom who brought her five children to Man Cave. Her name is Kianna. We started talking about why she and her daughters came back to the church's community nights for the second year. "They make you feel welcome," Kianna said, "They pray for you, and they're not judgmental. You can feel the love when someone takes time to acknowledge you."

The church started the community nights to reconnect to the local area. Kianna learned about it through a flyer from the school. She registered her daughters Niyanna and Zy'niya. "We got to meet new people and learn new things," Niyanna said. "Zy'niya loved her teachers," her mom told me, "There were many people with many different backgrounds coming together." While the girls were in their classes, Kianna attended the adults' class. "I liked the teaching about valuing family time," she remembered, "Instead of everybody just getting on their phones, we need to talk to each other and not be isolated."

Working through the public-school district, the congregation has adopted the school as a "faith partner." I asked Kianna how she feels about the partnership between the church and the school. "I love it! I didn't know how much the church was doing for the school. It's a big help. We're thankful for the way you guys spread God's love."

A long-time member of the congregation once asked, "How many people from that school have become members?" The answer is zero. These things take time.

"The vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay" (Hb 2:3).

Endnotes

- 1 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Philadelphia: Da Capo, 1997), 14.
- 2 Atul Gawande, "Slow Ideas," *New Yorker* (July 29, 2013), www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/07/29/slow-ideas
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.

The Preacher as Worldmaker

Reflections on the Nature and Purpose of Christian Preaching

Peter Nafzger



Peter Nafzger is assistant professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. His research

and teaching focuses on homiletics, the theology of the Word of God, and the nature and function of the Scriptures. He is the author of *These Are Written: Toward a Cruciform Theology of Scripture* (Pickwick, 2013) and *The Bright Star of Bethlehem Advent Bible Study* (Creative Communications, 2013).

What are Christians doing when they preach? It is a simple question. It is also an important question, for preaching is among the most foundational Christian practices. Like many simple and important questions, the most helpful answers are not always straightforward or obvious.

If you ask preachers (or their listeners), you will get a variety of responses. Some will focus on the *act*

of preaching. They might say preachers announce good news, teach the faith, exposit the Scriptures, or properly distinguish law and gospel. Others will emphasize the *effect* of preaching. They might say preachers comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, stir the heart and move to action, or kill and make alive. With more or less unpacking, each of these could work.

I suggest that these conceptions of Christian preaching are inadequate. They are not wrong. Indeed, some highlight important aspects of the preaching task. But they are too narrow. They assume too much and depend too heavily on a particular view of the world that is no longer universally held—not even among Christians. Especially in today’s situation, Christians need a broader, more basic conception of what they are doing when they preach.

What is today’s situation? In his consideration of the Western church’s contemporary context, Joel Okamoto notes a foundational change that has taken place over the last several centuries. During the Middle Ages, concepts such as God, the Bible, and salvation formed the unquestioned backdrop to all matters of life and

death. Specific beliefs differed, but everyone knew God existed, the Scriptures were important, and people needed salvation. Preachers could assume these things. Today this is no longer the case.

What were once unquestioned, even unquestionable, now need to account for themselves. Christians now need not only to identify their god (answering “Who is your god?”) but also to explain the very idea of God. It is no longer enough to have a position on the Bible as the Word of God. Christians now need to explain how it arose and how it is supposed to function. Salvation can no longer be taken for granted as the ultimate aim. Christians now need to explain why they think saving even should matter.¹

In other words, Christianity today faces competition. The accessibility of widely divergent and incompatible ways of looking at the world has called into question the most basic and fundamental Christian concepts and practices. Not only must Christians explain what they mean by God, the Bible, and salvation. They must also explain what they are doing when they evangelize, worship, and preach.

The competition comes from a variety of sources, including other religions and philosophies. One formidable rival is known as scientific materialism.² The extraordinary advance of science and technology, and the promise they offer for future progress, has made scientific materialism a dominant cultural force that has convinced many—including many inside the church. The problem is that scientific materialism has little or no room for God. Some grant the possibility that a divine being started everything, but the traditional Christian belief in a personal and presently active God is no longer credible. This puts Christians in a tough spot. They value and affirm scientific progress. They believe God desires everyone, including scientific materialists,

to be saved. But there is scarce middle ground between the two worldviews. This makes science a pressing cultural problem for the church.³

Which brings us back to preaching. Consider the Christian belief that death is the final enemy (1 Cor 15:26). In a culture in which death is feared, it makes sense to preach, without much explanation, that Jesus saves from death. But in a world where death is thought to be the natural course of existence, and believed by some to be beautiful and good, the news that Jesus has

The extraordinary advance of science and technology, and the promise they offer for future progress, has made scientific materialism a dominant cultural force.

conquered death not only fails to register as “good,” it may not even make sense.⁴ Similarly, a culture that operates with a sense of personal guilt and accountability before God for individual behavior will readily understand the need for forgiveness (and probably desire it). But in a culture where guilt is found in others but not the self,⁵ or where social shame is dreaded more than eternal punishment for sin,⁶ it is not obvious that a message of forgiveness will be recognized as necessary or important.

The church is sent to proclaim Jesus’s victory over death and his gracious words of forgiveness. This does not change regardless of the beliefs and assumptions of any given cultural context. But to those whose world is not shaped by the larger Christian story, these central components of the Christian message, especially when detached from the rest of the biblical narrative, are easily misheard, misunderstood, or apathetically dismissed.

Earlier I said we need a broader, more basic answer to the question, “What are Christians doing when they preach?”⁷ Here is my proposal: I suggest we think of preaching as worldmaking.⁸

What follows are some reflections on the relationship between the words we speak and the world(s) in which we live, aspects of the preaching task that I think are central, and why I believe this way of conceptualizing the preaching task is helpful for Christians.

Words and Worlds

Imagine a little girl looking up at the night sky with her father. She notices a couple of particularly bright stars. Gesturing to them, she asks her dad, “What is that?” The answer is easy. “That’s the Big Dipper,” he says, and proceeds to trace the familiar outline. The little girl listens carefully and connects the dots. After thinking about it for a while, she asks another question. “Who made the Big Dipper?” The father hesitates. This answer isn’t as easy. Did God make it or did we?

Philosopher Nelson Goodman says we made the Big Dipper. At some point in history, someone connected those specific stars in that particular order and told someone else about it. The idea stuck, and word spread. As a result, we live in world in which those lights in the night sky make up that specific constellation. It didn’t have to be that way. Other stars could have been connected to form other shapes or no shapes at all. But that’s not the world in which we live. In *this* world we have been told to see *that* shape, and every time we trace that pattern for our children, we continue making a world with a Big Dipper.

Goodman’s point is not only that we made this constellation. We also made the world in which this constellation exists. In his essay, “Words, Works, Worlds,” he argues that we have made, and continue to make, worlds through our speaking.⁹ This is not performative speech act theory, which recognizes the power of words to do things.¹⁰ That’s also true. But Goodman is after something different. He argues that words are instruments through which the world is made. In fact, he argues, words

enable us to make more than one single world. With the words we hear and the words we speak, we make and live in a variety of worlds.¹¹ This isn't as outlandish as it may sound. William Willimon puts it in everyday language: "We look out of our windows each morning and see the world we have been taught to see, noticing some aspects of our world while ignoring others."¹²

There are many versions of the world out there, and we inhabit more than one of them throughout our lives. Sometimes our world changes into a new version slowly, almost imperceptibly. The collective influence of many voices gradually reshapes our perception of reality until one day we wake up and realize we are living in a completely different world. Alex Bellos, for example, writes about a French scientist who spent time living among a community of Indians in the Amazon rainforest that has no words for numbers larger than five. Slowly, he adapted to their way of life and began to lose his sense of time and number. Upon returning to Paris he found great difficulty readjusting. Little by little his world had changed, making reentry to his previous world strange and uncomfortable.¹³ Other times, our world changes overnight. I recall as a young child, going on a fishing trip with my family. We left early in the morning while it was still dark. As I sat facing backwards in the third seat of our station wagon, I watched the night sky slowly change into morning. I was shocked to discover that night gradually *becomes* morning. Without giving it much thought, and fully unaware of the rotation of the earth in relation to the sun, I had previously assumed that God flipped a switch each morning. Such conversions happen when we are confronted with a new situation or convincing evidence that turns everything we thought we knew upside down. All of a sudden, we find ourselves seeing the world in a whole new light.¹⁴

There is not an infinite number of worlds in existence, Goodman insists. But there are many versions, even if some are sparsely inhabited. On occasion, we come across someone who seems to be "living in his own little world." According to Goodman, he actually is.

Preaching the Narrative

The significance of narrative for theology and philosophy has been thoroughly discussed.¹⁵ Among the influential studies is Stephen Crites's essay "The Narrative Quality of Experience."¹⁶ To make sense of our everyday experiences, Crites notes that time and memory come together in the formation and continuation of a story. That is, we locate our experiences within a narrative context. This narrative includes basic things such as where we come from, what is happening around us, and where we are going. Depending on the story we tell ourselves, we dismiss some experiences and identify others as central and significant. This requires no effort on our part. We do it naturally.

Recall the individual who lives in his own little world. Experiences that support his specific narrative further strengthen the story he tells himself. He tends to ignore

experiences that don't fit. As a result, he becomes all the more certain of the world as he has grown to see it. The cycle continues, and his world is reinforced over and over. His only way out of this world is a disruption significant enough to force him to rethink the whole story. (More about that in the next section.)

Christian preachers have always been in the business of describing the world as they believe it really is, and therefore Christian worldmaking is nothing new. But as I noted above, the church is entering a new relationship with Western culture. As the sun sets on Christendom and the church returns to a minority position, Christian preachers cannot assume their hearers live in the same world, or that they tell themselves the same story, told of in the Scriptures.

In his essay, "Telling God's Story," David Schmitt discusses several important aspects of the biblical narrative that contemporary preachers need to make explicit. First, preachers must tell the whole story. Rather than focusing solely on several central episodes, preachers must locate every biblical (and contemporary) episode within the unfolding "master story" that stretches "from creation to new creation."¹⁷ Second, preachers must help their hearers recognize the corporate nature of the Christian faith. Consider again the individual who lives in his own little world. The good news of the Christian message is not only that God promises forgiveness, life, and salvation to him *as an individual in his private little world*, it also means that he is incorporated into a people who live together under the reign and rule of God. The world in which he lives is no longer "his own." Without these two elements in our preaching—the broader narrative context and the corporate understanding of the Christian faith—central biblical episodes are easily smuggled into distorted versions of the world.¹⁸

There is no single, definitive way of telling the Christian narrative. But there are certain central episodes and events. In his 2018 Theological Symposium address "The Word of the Cross and the Story of Everything," Joel Okamoto offered a summary of the Christian narrative that follows this storyline: It begins with God creating all things. He makes it all good. But then evil enters his creation. Not surprising, God is not pleased. He curses what he made, but also promises redemption and restoration of all things (especially his human creatures). He begins this gracious work through Abraham and his children, and the story continues with this family and their struggle to trust and obey God's commands and promises. To encourage, and rebuke, and call them back to himself, God sends prophets to speak on his behalf. But the people do not listen, and their rejection means defeat and exile. God does not forget his

Christian preachers cannot assume their hearers live in the same world, or that they tell themselves the same story, told of in the Scriptures.

promises, however, and so he sends his Son to deliver them from their own sinfulness and establish God's reign. They do not listen to the Son, either, and they kill him. But then he rises from the dead, and in doing so, he vindicates his work and his words, and proceeds to send his disciples to continue his work by teaching and restoring, witnessing and inviting others into the family. Finally, he ascends into the clouds with a promise to return on the last day and finish what he started. As Okamoto puts it, "Then it will be really, really good."¹⁹

It is not necessary (or advisable) to preach this entire narrative in every single sermon. But week-in and week-out, Christian preaching should communicate this overarching story, carefully and intentionally locating the subject of every sermon within this broader narrative context. Schmitt describes this type of preaching as expansive rather than reductive.²⁰ Rather than preaching Jesus as the personal Lord and Savior of willing individuals, Jesus is proclaimed as the Lord of all creation and the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all people. Rather than leading hearers to look forward to individual entrance into heaven after death, the preacher helps them see themselves as members of God's chosen people who are being formed by God's Spirit to live new lives, eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus and the restoration of all things.²¹

Preaching Repentance

The challenge, as noted above, is that people have heard and believed conflicting stories, often without realizing it. This includes members of our own congregations. Walter Brueggemann speaks of our "closely held worlds" in a way that Goodman would appreciate:

The world we carry with us has shaped us and continues to shape us. It remains largely unrecognized and uncriticized, but it is the product of powerful, often intentional nurture, inculcation, instruction, and propaganda. It is a world imposed on us but which we, in many ways, have ourselves inhaled and internalized. There is no doubt that this world is taken up differently by each of us, depending on our particular narrative past, present circumstance, and current company of companions.²²

Brueggemann recognizes there are many worldmakers out there, and they are not only preachers from other theological or religious traditions. They are politicians, actors, athletes, pundits, teachers, advertisers, bloggers, et al, and they are good at what they do. Christians (and others) have "inhaled and internalized" their false or incomplete versions of the world. As Willimon puts it, "We are formed not only by baptism but by a host of other masters."²³ The result is that we bounce between multiple worlds depending on our current company of companions.²⁴

This is where worldmaking seems especially useful for thinking about what Christians are doing when they preach. By paying attention to the specific world(s) of their hearers, preachers learn about the stories they have been told and through

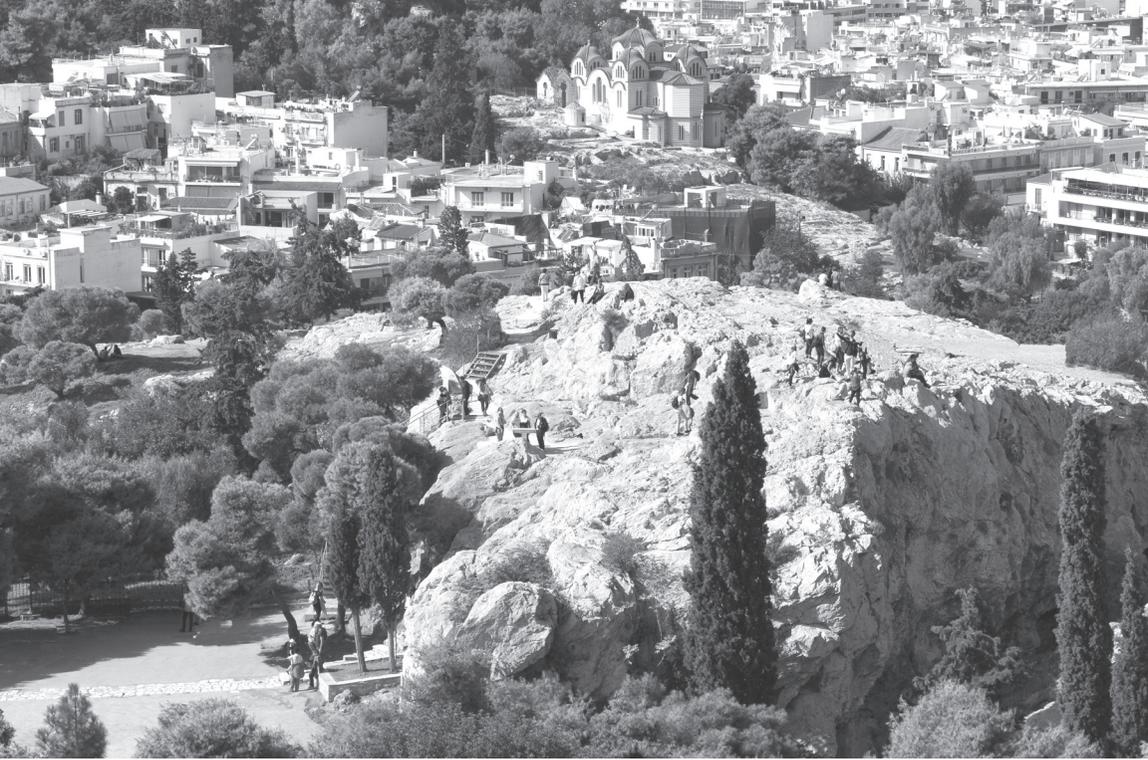
which they make sense of life. Because of sin (both within and without), these worlds are always distortions of the one true world. Every instance of preaching, therefore, is an exercise in exposing false versions of the world and proclaiming the world as it really is. “Christian speakers do not just massage the world as we find it,” says Willimon. “We create a new world.”²⁵

For some hearers, this will require minor remodeling. For others, it will require significant renovation. For many, especially those outside the church, it will require nothing less than demolition.

This part of the preaching task goes by many names. Willimon describes it as “dismantling,” “subverting,” “detoxification,” and “dislocation.” Or, to use a more churchy word, he calls it “preaching repentance.”²⁶ To preach repentance in this sense is not only to call sinners to turn away from specific sins, or to incite personal feelings of guilt. That’s part of it. But more broadly, it involves calling out hearers for participating in the creation of false versions of the world, and for making themselves at home in distortions of the way the world really is. To repent in this sense is to disavow and turn away from false worlds, trusting God to forgive us, renew us, and lead us to delight in his will and walk in his world to the glory of his name.

This fits with Goodman’s conception of worldmaking. He notes that worldmaking always begins with previously existing versions of the world. Depending on what we hear from others and tell ourselves, we add and subtract, refine and revise, reorder and rearrange. As a result, we bring into existence a new world version. “Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; *the making is a remaking.*”²⁷ Here the connection between worldmaking and preaching is most obvious. The Christian preacher is in the business of *remaking* the world for hearers as it has been described for us in the Scriptures. To do this, preachers must explain, teach, and correct misunderstandings about God, the world, and the human condition. Through this teaching, preachers make the world for hearers as it really is. But in itself, this is not enough. If preachers only talk *about* the world they are making, it remains an object to be studied. In order to bring hearers *into* this world, preachers must speak God’s promises. In the name of Jesus, and on his behalf, preachers speak God’s “for you” promises directly to the listeners in their congregations. This takes them off the sidelines and brings them into the story, into the new (biblical) world. When this happens, and when God works and strengthens faith in their hearts according to his gracious will, this world becomes *their* world.²⁸

Every instance of preaching is an exercise in exposing false versions of the world and proclaiming the world as it really is.



The Areopagus, where Paul preached in Acts 17, as seen from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

Preaching like Paul

What does it look like to engage in preaching as worldmaking? While the cultural and chronological distance between Paul's world and ours makes impossible a simple repetition of his (or any biblical) preaching, our increasingly post-Christian world is beginning to look more and more like Paul's pre-Christian world. This makes his letters and sermons in Acts useful resources for preaching today.²⁹

Particularly helpful is Paul's preaching before the Areopagus in Athens as it is recorded in Acts 17:22–34.³⁰ Consider how he went about the task. Before he opened his mouth to speak, Paul spent time getting to know the world of his hearers. He observed their altars, listened to their stories, and identified points of contact between their world and the biblical world.³¹ "In him we live and move and have our being," he could affirm. He also found agreement with their poets, who understood human beings to be offspring of the divine. But they were still living in a false world, so he also needed to raise points of confrontation.³² God does not dwell in humanly made temples, but rather appoints times and places where humans dwell. God is the Creator of all things, and made all nations through a single man. What's more, God has appointed another man to judge all people. In view of this coming judgment, all people everywhere must repent. The assurance of these things is the resurrection of this second man.

There are several things to notice about how Paul was (re)making the world for his hearers. First, he began at the beginning. He proclaimed the Christian God as the Creator of everything and the one who holds together and reigns over all things. Second, Paul does not speak about Jesus's death for their forgiveness. Instead, he emphasizes Jesus's resurrection as the vindication of God's call to repent. The resurrection, then, forms the bridge for further conversation with those who want to hear him again, which certainly would have included more about Jesus's life, death, and promise to return. Third, Paul does not focus on individual sins or guilt. His call to repent is broad and all encompassing. Through this call, he moves beyond speaking *about* God and begins speaking directly to his hearers *for* God. This world, he says, is *your* world. This God is *your* God.

Finally, it's worth noting that the reaction to Paul's preaching was mixed. Some mocked his message, and some still mock this message today. Others listened and wanted to hear more, and some of them believed. This also still happens today. As Christian preachers continue to (re)make the world for their hearers (inside and outside the church), they can expect a similarly mixed reaction. They preach the one true world into existence for their hearers, and they usher hearers into this world by proclaiming God's commands and promises directly to them. In doing so, they trust that God will work faith and life according to his good and gracious will.

Endnotes

- 1 Joel P. Okamoto, "When Salt Loses Its Saltiness: Nihilism and the Contemporary Church" *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 4 (2018): 43.
- 2 Scientific materialism (also referred to as scientism) is the idea that physical reality, which is made available to us through the natural sciences, is *all* that truly exists.
- 3 For a thoughtful consideration of the serious challenge science presents to Christians today, see Joel Okamoto, "Modern Science, Contemporary Culture, and Christian Theology" *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 45–63.
- 4 As a pastor, I often felt compelled to insist at funerals and in Bible class, that death is not natural. That I needed to argue for this demonstrates the distance between our culture's view of death and the Christian worldview.
- 5 See Wilfred M. McClay, "The Strange Persistence of Guilt," *The Hedgehog Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2017).
- 6 See Andy Crouch, "The Return of Shame," *Christianity Today* 59, no. 2 (March 2015): 32–41.
- 7 This answer should not accommodate itself to the prevailing cultural trends. Neither should it resist engaging the culture and taking seriously its concerns. On the perennial temptation to "accommodation" and "resistance," see Okamoto, "When Salt Loses Its Saltiness": 43–44.
- 8 I haven't seen any homiletical text explicitly frame preaching as worldmaking, but this kind of language is not uncommon. Richard Lischer, for examples, notes that "the sermons we preach create a 'world' comprised of the characters, stories, anecdotes, allusions, and proofs with which we enfold our basic arguments." *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 89. As the endnotes in the rest of this article will show, Lischer is not the only homiletician who speaks about preaching this way.
- 9 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 1–22.
- 10 See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 11 To be precise, Goodman argues that we make *versions* of the world through our speaking. He does not suggest (and neither do I) that we make worlds *ex nihilo* as God does in Genesis 1. See Goodman's interchange with Israel Scheffler and Hilary Putnam on this point in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormack (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). I describe preaching as "worldmaking" to avoid the more cumbersome "world-version-making."
- 12 William Willimon, *The Intrusive Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 89.
- 13 See *Here's Looking at Euclid: A Surprising Excursion through the Astonishing World of Math*, (Free Press, 2010), 1–5. This is an unusual example, of course. The awareness of a gradual conversion from one world to another happens more commonly when students return home from college for the first time, or when soldiers return to civilian life after long deployments.
- 14 Similar immediate changes take place when one receives an unexpected and serious diagnosis, or when a spouse is discovered to be unfaithful. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is a biblical example.
- 15 See, for example, Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).
- 16 Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (1971): 291–311.
- 17 David R. Schmitt, "Telling God's Story" *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 1 (2014): 101–112. Schmitt distinguishes between "telling" the story and "telescoping" the story on single events such as the crucifixion. Jesus's death is undeniably at the center of the Christian gospel. But it cannot be removed from the larger biblical narrative.
- 18 John W. Wright identifies such a distortion in his description of the dominant American Christian narrative. Shaped by Puritan emphasis on the individual experience of sin and salvation, and the belief that America is the new Israel, the dominant American Christian narrative departs from the biblical story and the world it describes. *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), esp. chap. 2.

- 19 Joel Okamoto, “The Word of the Cross and the Story of Everything.” Plenary address, Theological Symposium, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, September 19, 2018.
- 20 Schmitt, “Telling God’s Story,” 109.
- 21 The emphasis on communal formation through preaching is a common theme in recent homiletical literature. See, for example, Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 31–32; James M. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 90–106; Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 88–92.
- 22 Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 10.
- 23 Willimon, *Peculiar Speech*, 75.
- 24 Preachers are not exempt from this, which is why they also need to have their world continually remade for them.
- 25 Willimon, *Peculiar Speech*, 86.
- 26 Willimon, *Peculiar Speech*, 31–66.
- 27 Goodman, 6. My emphasis.
- 28 Oswald Bayer speaks of the relation between the promise of God and the narrative into which the gospel brings its hearers. “The *promissio* however needs to be situated in and by the narration. . . . Narratives offer possibilities of identification. Suddenly, I see myself in these stories and hear them as my own story.” See “Preaching the Word,” in *Justification Is for Preaching*, ed. Virgil Thompson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 206.
- 29 James Thompson suggests that Paul’s letters are windows into his preaching, and therefore can provide valuable guidance for preaching today. *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), esp. chap. 1.
- 30 See Mark A. Seifrid’s consideration of Paul’s preaching in Athens in “Beyond Law and Gospel? Reflections on Speaking the Word in a (Post)modern World” *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2017): 29–42. He describes Paul’s preaching in Acts 17 as a “collision of worldviews” (30).
- 31 This reminds us that, when it comes to preaching, exegeting the culture is just as important for the preacher as exegeting the Scriptures.
- 32 Seifrid notes that Paul works with “points of contact” and “points of confrontation” in his preaching. “Beyond Law and Gospel?”: 31.

Homiletical Helps

Proclaiming in His Name Preaching the Gospel of Luke in Year C

Jeffrey A. Oswald

At the end of the Gospel according to Luke, Luke records the following words of our Lord, spoken to his disciples moments before his ascension to the Father:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Lk 24:46–47 ESV)

This is neither a prophecy nor a commission. A translation somewhat closer to the structure of the sentence in Greek, trying to emphasize the noun-like force of the infinitives here, would be:

Thus it stands written: the Passion of the Christ and the Resurrection of the Christ from among the dead on the third day and the Preaching in His name of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke's reader knows that the first two of these, passion and resurrection, have already taken place and so the third, preaching, must also. The divine certainty of the Lord's word guarantees it. As you take up Luke's Gospel in this new year, and as you proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name, you, too, become part of this third biblical certainty.

And yet, there's something hauntingly disconcerting about being part of this 2000-year sermon series. Even if Years A, B, and C have not blurred into one long law/gospel sermon for you, you may still feel like you've been preaching basically the same thing for years, if not decades, and that your people have been hearing the same thing from you week after week for years, if not decades. Can it be that we collectively or I in my own congregation have exhausted these texts? When was the last time I

read Luke and learned something genuinely new about my Jesus, something truly important that really made a difference? And if the text has nothing new to say to me, where am I going to find something new to say to my people? Has “good news” become just a euphemism for the “old, old story”?

I make my stand with Luke and will try here to defend the claim that Luke has much that is good and new to tell us, much that can truly make a difference. I will also argue that you have the unique (yes, unique!) opportunity in the coming year to experience Luke’s Gospel along with your people in a way that will leave you both changed forever. This will not be easy, and it will especially not be easy for you. But my hope is that you will at least catch a glimpse of why it could be worth it.

What we are presented with in the Gospel according to Luke is a careful study of the life and work of the Lord Jesus, written by a consummate literary artist, in order to strengthen the Christian in faith and knowledge and to entice the world into a study of Jesus based on a true and careful account. Does that sound like something you could use in your parish?

Can you even imagine not just Christendom, but even Western Civilization, without Gabriel’s visit to the young virgin, and Mary’s hymn; without the too-full inn, the angels, the shepherds, the manger, the swaddling clothes of Christmas; the “Gloria in excelsis” of the angels and the “Nunc dimittis” of Simeon; without the boy in his Father’s house about his Father’s business; or the young preacher who quoted to his home congregation from the ancient prophet “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me” and then proclaimed to them “today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”? What about a world without the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son—not to mention the lost sheep; without Zacchaeus and dinner with Martha and Mary? Who would willingly give up the words “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” or “Today you will be with me in paradise”? Or the angelic question “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” Or the all-too-human question “Did not our hearts burn within us?” All of these are known to us only through Luke’s Gospel. Now the church is asking *you* to make sure we don’t have a world—now or in the next generation—without these treasures.

But I guess I’m supposed to be helping you to preach, not preaching to you! Let’s get to some of the practical concerns of preaching Luke’s Gospel, then return to look anew at some of the main themes of this work.

One of your greatest challenges in the coming year will be to keep the one Gospel from becoming dozens of pericopes. Of course, you cannot read your people the whole Gospel every Sunday, and, over the course of fifty-two Sundays, we cannot even read the whole Gospel (or could we? It would only be about twenty-two verses each week.). A quick glance at the Year C readings on pages xviii and xix in LSB will show you that, even in this “Year of Luke,” we do not read Luke straight through nor do we read only Luke. Let’s turn to the selections from Luke used in Year C and see just how much Luke we get to work with.

I had initially thought to compare the coverage of Luke in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH), *Lutheran Worship* (LW), and *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB), but decided not to reproduce the results for you: the study demonstrated what most of you probably already know. There was a significant increase in the amount of Luke read on Sunday morning with the change to the three-year lectionary. Readings from Luke accounted for twenty-three of the seventy-three readings in TLH for the Sundays and major festivals of the year; compared with fifty-five of the seventy-nine readings listed for Year C in LSB. I did not take the time to count verses, but my general impression is that the LSB lectionary is also an increase when compared with LW. There is certainly a lot less of the cut-and-paste style readings that I found frustrating with LW. Back, then, to LSB.

We probably would not expect that all the miracle accounts or even all the parables would make it into the lectionary, but there are some places where the structure of Luke's Gospel, so carefully ordered and interwoven a narrative, is weakened or, at least, obscured. Let's use chapters 1 and 2 as an example. See how the "triptych" structure of Luke's birth narrative is dismantled by omitting the cycle of stories concerning John's birth. The careful step parallelism is no longer visible, a parallelism that provides much-needed context in which to read the story of Jesus's birth—as parallel to but always "greater than" John's. Of course, no one's going to complain that he doesn't get a chance to preach on the genealogy, but store this in your heart and ponder how still more threads connecting *this* story to the OT story of salvation have been cut by omitting it.

In looking at what is and is not included in the readings, my greatest concern is the omission of all three passion predictions: 9:21–22; 9:44–45 (introduced ironically by our Lord, "Let these words sink into your ears"); and 18:31–34. Perhaps some of these are made up for from readings from other Gospels, but given the major themes in *this* Gospel, this is a serious concern for the preacher. Let's turn to some of those themes now. Let's try to look briefly at three.

The Purpose of God in Luke

In the garden, Jesus prays that his Father's θέλημα be done. Fitzmyer comments: "The n. *thelēma* refers not to a capricious whim of the Father who subjects his son to death in satisfaction for human sins and offenses against divine majesty, but rather to the Father's plan of salvation for humanity, as the n. is used in Acts 21:14; 22:14."¹

This word is part of a "vocabulary of God's design" that runs throughout Luke's Gospel. Joel Green summarizes for us:

We may discern Luke's interest in the design of God by attending to a series of expressive terms—especially βουλή (purpose), βούλομαι (to want), δεῖ (it is necessary), θέλημα (will), θέλω (to will), ὀρίζω (to determine), πληρόω (to fulfill), and προφήτης (prophet). These are not technical terms for Luke, nor is each developed in a discrete way by the Evangelist. Rather, employed in a variety of co-

texts, they help shape an understanding of God and God's purpose that occupies a central place in the theology of the Gospel of Luke.²

Note the main points of Fitzmyer's description of this plan:

- a. Luke's understanding of a fundamental divine plan is central to his understanding of salvation history.
- b. God has predetermined that things will happen in accordance with this plan
- c. This is why things are described as "necessary." This necessity is often expressed by the word *δεῖ*. The word occurs once each in Matthew and Mark, eleven times in Luke (esp. 24:44), and seventeen times in Acts.
- d. The execution or realization of this plan is spoken of by Luke as "fulfillment."
- e. The goal of this plan is the salvation of humankind.³

Prior to chapter 22, *δεῖ* is used three times of the coming suffering of Christ. Only one of those references makes it into the LSB readings. It is hard for me to imagine doing justice to Luke's story without this theme. Keeping it in the ears and thoughts of your people this year will require some additional work on your part. You will not be able to count on the appointed readings alone to do that for you.

Salvation in Luke

I will have to be brief here, but I challenge you to try to formulate a description of this theme in Luke's Gospel. Joel Green points out that "Luke uses the language of salvation more than any other New Testament writer, but employs that language in co-texts whose effect is to give salvation broad meaning."⁴ Prominent in Luke's Gospel is the connection between all that Jesus does and salvation: healing, preaching, teaching—not simply suffering and dying. Think, then, of how much the statement of the crowd betrays their own notion of salvation: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" (23:35). What did salvation mean to them, if not simply escaping a present threat? Is this Luke's way of challenging us to ask ourselves what we think of as salvation? Is it escaping something (and the narrower the escape the greater the feat of salvation) or is it setting all things right? What are we looking for? What is this Jesus offering to us? What does his death and resurrection accomplish? This moment in the preaching of the passion of our Lord is a critical moment for us to pause and let Luke and his Lord correct our inadequate notions of the salvation our God both promises and brings.

Repentance and Forgiveness in Luke

"The *concept* of repentance is present everywhere in the Gospel of Luke," notes Green. The language of repentance is also used more frequently by Luke than by Matthew or

Mark, as the following table shows:

Gospel	"repentance"	"to repent"
Matthew	2x	5x
Mark	1x	2x
Luke	5x	9x
Acts 6x	6x	5x
	11x	14x

Exploring what exactly *repentance* means in Luke's writings is as worthwhile, fruitful, and necessary as exploring what *salvation* means for Luke. We must not take for granted that our people or we ourselves truly understand repentance. If you were to share Fitzmyer's definition of *repentance* in Luke's writings—" [it] literally denotes a change of mind. But in the NT, it is almost always used in the religious sense of a turning from sin, repentance for sin. It connotes a new beginning in moral conduct"⁶—you would likely hear protests of "works righteousness" and "the confusion of justification and sanctification." And if you were to anonymously offer Luther's definition of the word from his Ninety-Five Theses—"the Greek word *metanoieite* itself, . . . means 'repent' and could be translated more exactly by the Latin *transmentamini*, which means 'assume another mind and feeling, recover one's senses, make a transition from one state of mind to another, have a change of spirit'"⁷—how many of your hearers would recognize the definition as Lutheran theology?

It intrigues me that in all of the NT there is only one time when the indicative mood of the verb μετανοέω is used to report that someone actually repented. That one case is Luke 11:32 (=Matthew 12:41); and it refers to the men of Ninevah, who repented at the preaching of Jonah. We would expect that, what with the NT's emphasis on repentance, we would hear reports everywhere of people repenting. At the end of Luke, our Lord summarizes the whole gospel as "the proclamation of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (24:47), so this is an ideal opportunity to force ourselves to wrestle again with the hard question of the relationship between repentance (and faith) and forgiveness (and salvation) (and life). Texts like the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32; Lent 4) and Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10; Proper 26) are just two of the many pericopes that will provide you with the opportunity to do just that.⁸

The Death of the Lord Jesus and His Resurrection in Luke

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to teach a doctoral level course on Luke here at Concordia Seminary, and I posed this as the focus of our semester's work together:

“What is the significance for Luke of the death of the Lord Jesus?” The question has driven my own thinking about Luke ever since. Let me share a few of the conclusions such thought has brought me to.

1. Luke answers the question “How can I be saved?” by narrating the history of God fulfilling in Jesus Christ his purpose to save his creation.
2. One way to describe this story is as a “great reversal” of history’s pattern. In support of this thesis, we can consider the following points:
 - a. The contrast in the infancy narratives between John and Jesus already begins to cause the reader to question his assumption that Jesus will follow—like John—in the long line of the prophets of God whose arrivals have been announced by means of their wondrous births. Responses to Jesus’s birth support this questioning.
 - b. The words and wonders of Jesus do more than convince Israel of God’s continued presence among them—often offending them in the process. In other words, Jesus is not simply alleviating Israel’s misery or shoring up their flagging endurance while they wait for God’s redemption.
 - c. When Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem, his kingship is tied neither to David nor to Israel, and the cosmic significance of his reign is proclaimed. Jesus himself validates this testimony (although he does not, thereby, attest to the completeness of the disciples’ understanding or faith).
 - d. At the Supper, Jesus inaugurates a new covenant established by his own death.
 - e. Although his innocence is demonstrated, Jesus *must* die. This is required for God’s purpose to be accomplished—though neither our Lord nor Luke gives us a clear statement of the *why*.
 - f. Jesus is raised from the dead—contrary to the expectations of enemies and followers alike. There is no Simeon in Luke 24.
3. History’s pattern can be reversed only by means of the resurrection. There were many innocent martyrs in Israel’s history—even in recent history—but not one had been raised by God from the dead in the here and now.
4. Peter Doble’s exposition of the “righteous man” model (think especially of the OT Joseph) fits perfectly with this approach—right up to the moment of unprecedented divine action.⁹
5. Had the reversal occurred before the death of Jesus, the reversal would not have been unambiguously God’s doing.
6. Contrary to the commonly expressed view, and as Peter Doble has helped to

make clear, Luke does have a theology of the cross. It is true Luke does not include the statement of Jesus that he came to “give His life as a ransom for many” (cf. Mt 20:28, Mk 10:45), but Luke clearly presents substitutionary aspects of the death of Jesus.

- a. The Words of Institution: Luke 22:19–20, especially the “given for you/poured out for you.”
 - b. In the pattern of proclamation: death → resurrection → repentance → forgiveness → salvation.
 - c. Jesus is numbered with the transgressors: 22:37.
 - d. Acts 20:28 (note the context of the one reference to the sacrificial blood of Jesus).
7. Substitution alone, however, would not mean the reversal of history’s pattern nor would it require a new covenant. Note also the pattern in the sermons in Acts: “You killed him, but God raised him.”

The panorama of salvation presented by Luke is literally unequalled in the New Testament. No single author presents us with as much of the life of Jesus, nor places it in the context of as much of the life of the people of God. Let me close with a few points on the hermeneutical significance of the resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus According to Luke

A. The Resurrection Itself

1. Robert Smith, commenting on Luke 24:8–9: “Luke’s view is that God has shaped the history of his people by his words of promise and by his deeds of visitation. He has acted and he will act. Remembering his past utterances, counting on his promises, and taking him at his word are all part and parcel of living as his sons and daughters. Luke theologizes by telling the story, calling to mind the past, and declaring the mighty acts of God on behalf of his people. For him the Old Testament is not a book of law or a set of legal precedents but a great, unfinished historical narrative, a movement rushing to a climax, as the sermons in the book of Acts clearly demonstrate. His theology takes the form of confessional narrative or doxological report.”¹⁰
2. The resurrection is the great climax toward which all of history has been rushing. Luke is ready, and his readers are ready. The only people who are not yet ready, it seems, are the people actually witnessing this cosmic drama. But we need to be fair:
3. In his “Notes” on 24:11, Fitzmyer quotes from Conzelmann’s *An Outline*

of the Theology of the New Testament: “The significance of [the women’s idle tale] is that it expresses the truth that the Resurrection cannot be deduced from an idea (of Messiahship) or from the historical life of Jesus, but that it is announced as something new. It is only in retrospect that it casts light on Jesus’ life, and it is not until now that the disciples understand what they should have understood long ago. Now, after the event, their misunderstanding really becomes inconceivable.”¹¹ What, finally, brings them from misunderstanding to understanding (and faith)?

B. The Risen Lord Opens the Minds of His Disciples to Understand the Scriptures

1. In his provocative essay “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection” (worth reviewing in this Year of Luke), Richard Hays offers the following thesis:
 - a. “We interpret Scripture rightly only when we read it in light of the resurrection, and we begin to comprehend the resurrection only when we see it as the climax of the scriptural story of God’s gracious deliverance of Israel.”¹²
2. Jesus the Exegete
 - a. The risen Lord becomes the definitive interpreter of “the things about himself in all the scriptures” (v. 27).
 - b. Cleopas and his anonymous companion on the road to Emmaus are well acquainted with all the stories and traditions about Jesus’s life, including the report of the empty tomb and the angelic proclamation of the resurrection (vv. 19–24). Nonetheless, they are departing Jerusalem in a state of gloomy disappointment: “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (v. 21a). This is a moment of wrenching irony: Jesus, the Redeemer of Israel, stands before them, yet they fail to recognize him.
 - c. The whole story of Israel builds to its narrative climax in Jesus, the Messiah who had to suffer before entering into his glory. That is what Jesus tries to teach them on the road.
3. Implications for Our Practices of Reading¹³
 - a. “God is the subject of the crucial verbs in the biblical story.”
 - b. “When we read Scripture in light of the resurrection, we understand Scripture as testimony to the life-giving power of God. The resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated miracle but a disclosure of God’s purpose finally to subdue death and to embrace us within the life of the resurrection.”

- c. “The New Testament’s resurrection accounts teach us to read the Old Testament as Christian Scripture.”
- d. “Reading in light of the resurrection is figural reading.”
- e. “To read Scripture in light of the resurrection is to read with emphasis on eschatological hope. . . . Reading in light of the resurrection in no way nullifies the cross. In some New Testament scholarship, there has been a tendency to disparage resurrection texts such as Luke 24 as ‘triumphalistic’ in contrast to a Pauline *theologia crucis*. This tendency simply displays a misunderstanding of the way the New Testament’s resurrection stories function: by vindicating the crucified Jesus, the resurrection marks the cross as ‘the decisive, apocalyptic event that makes sense of Israel’s story.’”
- f. “Reading Scripture in light of the resurrection produces an epistemological transformation of the readers. Having encountered the risen Jesus, we are forced—enabled—to revise our perceptual categories and our estimates of what is ‘real.’ The epistemological shift is nicely illustrated by Paul’s rhetorical question in his speech before Agrippa: ‘Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?’”

An Historical Afterthought

Eve-Marie Becker has written a study titled *The Birth of Christian History: Memory and Time from Mark to Luke–Acts*. I bring it up here not to argue its merits or weaknesses but simply to make the point that sometimes, I fear, we give Luke too much credit as the father of Christian history. I think Luke was simply a very good example of what he saw in the apostles, and of what he indirectly encourages every one of us to be: a good witness—someone who keeps his eyes and ears open and watches for the way God is at work in this time and place. Luke didn’t so much create things: he just noticed them—and wrote them down for us.

In a recent return to the connections between the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts, I noticed something that I had not seen before, something that I think Luke is trying to point out to us. Notice the correspondence between the momentous events of Jesus’s death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost with the pattern of Israel’s life and worship: we have first our Lord’s death as the great Passover, his exodus that he was going to accomplish. This is followed by our Lord’s resurrection, the firstfruits in the 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. Luke is not creating anything; he just has his eyes focused on the way that God works as the author of our history as well as of our salvation.

This is the world that you have the opportunity to explore in the coming year; this is the world to which you have been called as a guide for your people. Have we exhausted these texts? I doubt we have even seriously scratched the surface of their message for us.

Endnotes

- 1 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X—XXIV* Anchor Bible 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1442.
- 2 Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 29.
- 3 Fitzmyer, *Luke I—IX*, 179ff.
- 4 Green, 94.
- 5 Green, 107.
- 6 Fitzmyer, *Luke I—IX*, 237.
- 7 *Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses*, LW 31, 84.
- 8 For a brief review of repentance and forgiveness in biblical thought, see the April 2018 CTCR document “Confession and Absolution,” 4–7.
- 9 See Peter Doble, *The Paradox of Salvation: Luke’s Theology of the Cross* SNTS Monograph Series 87 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 10 Robert H. Smith, *Easter Gospels: The Resurrection of Jesus according to the Four Evangelists* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1983), 109–110.
- 11 Fitzmyer, *Luke X—XXIV*, 1547.
- 12 Richard B. Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* ed. Ellen F. Davis, and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 216–238. I will not defend the thesis here; Hays does that more than adequately in the essay.
- 13 Hays, “Reading Scripture,” 232–238.

Reviews

**HOLDING UP THE PROPHET'S
HAND: Supporting Church Workers.**

By Bruce Hartung. Concordia Publishing House, 2011. 318 pages. Paper. \$13.99.

**BUILDING UP THE BODY OF
CHRIST: Supporting Community**

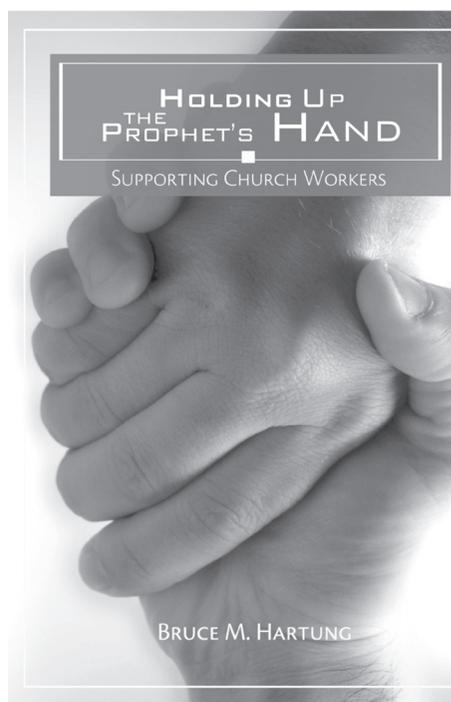
Life in the Church. By Bruce Hartung. Concordia Publishing House, 2016. 206 pages. Paper. \$14.99.

These two companion volumes hang together on the theme of community. Specifically, they both discuss the unique and powerful ways God intended the relationships within his church to be a support to both laity and worker. The first volume, *Holding Up the Prophet's Hand: Supporting Church Workers*, thoroughly discusses the unique challenges church workers face as a feature of being “called by God to apply the Gospel to the most daunting human experiences” and presents possible solutions to these challenges grounded in the community life of the church. The second volume, *Building Up the Body of Christ: Supporting Community Life in the Church*, takes its title from the fourth chapter of Ephesians and explores the means by which “church leaders can mobilize to strengthen community in tangible ways.”

Holding Up the Prophet's Hand is organized into four main sections. The first section lays out the problems facing, and a rationale for tending to, worker health. At the core of this rationale is the assertion that when church workers are doing what God calls them to do

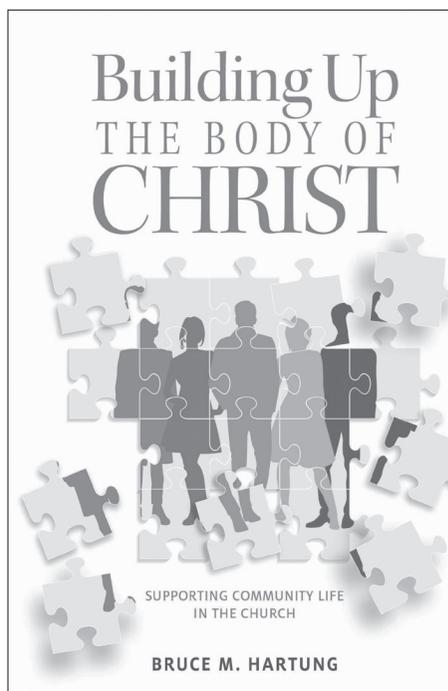
“workers assume a higher risk, spiritually speaking,” and congregations then “must faithfully take up the task of supporting our workers.” The second and third sections discuss a framework that can be utilized in the local congregation. This framework is rooted in the “resources Christ gives,” including the popular Wholeness Wheel. The final section digs into some of the more difficult issues that the church faces when worker health “goes south.” The issues addressed in this book are wide ranging and comprehensive. In particular, the sections on secondary traumatic stress, marriage and family, and addiction are required reading for workers and lay leaders charged with interacting with and caring for workers.

I have encountered several resources



aimed at helping church workers, both at the preventative and intervention levels. A significant contribution of this first volume is the clear and well-presented section on the spiritual aspect of this battle. The sociological and psychological aspects receive treatment in many volumes and have been the topic of recent empirical studies (e.g., The Flourishing in Ministry Project; University of Notre Dame), but it is astounding how little heed is paid to the very real spiritual resistance and attack facing the church and its workers. Hartung illuminates the challenges facing church workers through a rich spiritual lens and does so with the authority that his experience with both workers and seminarians reflect. The proof of this book's value is in the successful initiatives currently being implemented nationally grounded in the teachings of this book.

The second volume, *Building Up the Body of Christ*, grounds its thesis in the fact that social cohesion is declining in America and as a result, in the church. Hartung wisely uses the term *church leaders* to capture the multiple layers of leadership within the church. While care is taken to delineate between the unique vocations within the church, the book is written not just for clergy or workers, but all those who lead and care for the community life of the church. The focus of the book is on the “characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors” that “build up the community, the Body of Christ, in the local church.” From the beginning and throughout the book, Hartung securely fixes this focus in the baptismal identity of



the Christian “made so by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Hartung first articulates the problem in spiritual terms. This is, again, refreshing and powerful. It stands in contrast to many volumes aimed at church leadership that fail to discuss the problem in these terms, instead exclusively presenting both the problem and solution in purely psychological and sociological language. This does not mean that Hartung fails to articulate the very real incarnational aspect of the problem. His discussion of the breakdown of community, the secondary traumatic stress leaders face, and the neuroscience of relationships is also robust and illuminating. The overall organization of this book is less clear than the first, but each chapter builds on the notion that

“the community that is a part of the Body of Christ is a gift of God.”

In essence, the first book is a call to tend to the health of workers through the community Christ made possible. The second volume is a call to leaders to use those same gifts to create the Christ-centered cohesion needed to push back against the spiritual forces that are disintegrating culture and the church. Hartung’s use of anecdotes and case illustrations throughout both books are of particular value. Additionally, his sections of first-person commentary vitalized both books with a personal clarity and zeal that demonstrate his passion for and history with the topics discussed. Taken together, these volumes are a valuable contribution to the everyday spiritual and systemic health of the local congregation.

*Justin Hannemann
Elkhorn, Nebraska*

AWAITING THE KING: Reforming Public Theology. By James K. A. Smith. Baker Academic, 2017. 256 pages. Paper. \$22.99.

It took some time before I got around to reading the first two installments of James K. A. Smith’s *Cultural Liturgies* project. Only after confronting too many references to ignore did I finally pick up *Desiring the Kingdom*, and then *Imagining the Kingdom*. In light of those texts, I greeted the arrival of *Awaiting the King* with genuine anticipation—especially after I saw the subtitle:

Reforming Public Theology. I was hooked, and the book vaulted to the top of my reading list.

As expected, Smith provides a carefully crafted and engaging account of the ideas, problems, and arguments that eventually provoked him sufficiently to pull together those disparate threads into a new book. Smith is a pleasure to read for both his content as well as his style. Prose that can describe society as “an archipelago of egoists” (134) is its own reward, but that gift is coupled with the ability to take the esoteric and lofty and make it both accessible (well, mostly) and surprisingly relevant. To follow along as he juxtaposed and eventually connected, whether seamlessly or not, Augustine, Kuyper, Hauerwas, and O’Donovan was enjoyable and educational. But, the threads that make up this present book seem a bit more parochial and narrow than those that were woven together in his previous two volumes. While Smith inevitably writes from and for the Calvinist-shaped corner of the faith that formed him, *Awaiting the King* takes up questions that might fascinate only the most ardent and educated members of that tradition. Whether or not Kuyper is to blame for a version of Christianity that cordons off the sacred from the secular and then too readily accommodates itself to the prevalent culture is not an overwhelming concern of those outside that orbit, I suspect. Still, since that corrupt version of the faith is altogether familiar and uncomfortably recognizable even among believers who wouldn’t know Kuyper from an ottoman at Ikea, the question is

more relevant and pressing than it might initially seem. Smith wrestles with the old, perennial, and important problem of how exactly one who is committed to follow Christ is to think about and interact with a world that has a decidedly different orientation.

Smith's quest for an answer arises from a place and then travels a path that are equally foreign to most Lutheran readers, but when he arrives with more or less certainty at his present location, those same Lutheran readers should feel pleasantly at home. Smith's moves are not entirely idiosyncratic. His description of the wonderful yet disquieting experience of reading Hauerwas in the context of his own conventional and conservative American Christian upbringing was reassuringly familiar. Having encountered Hauerwas in much the same way, I was not surprised to hear Smith confess that Hauerwas had led him at length not into a tribal retreat from the world but rather directly into the midst of the world. Reading Hauerwas brought me to the same place, and left me with a similar problem. Smith was left to contend with those who twist Augustine and Kuyper to endorse a version of Christianity that would transform the culture via engagement that borders on endorsement coupled with a studied concealment and exclusion of Christ from that engagement. My task has been to confront those who too conveniently would bifurcate their Christian life into hermetically sealed spheres, one spiritual and churchly the other secular and patriotic, and do it all in the name of Luther.

In the midst of supporting and

occasionally distracting topics and texts, it seems that Smith ultimately seeks a church unafraid of the world, but one also that is unafraid to manifest and declare to that world the reality of Christ and his truth that is the sole meaning and hope of the world. Neither as pessimistic about the world and its governments as Hauerwas, nor as sanguine about the prospects of transforming the culture as his own tradition, the interface envisioned by Smith is not far from one that a faithful Lutheran should endorse. Smith moves from a distorted Kuyperian Calvinism through Hauerwas back to Kuyper with a little help from O'Donovan. I move from a misconstrued Lutheranism through Hauerwas back to Luther with a little help from Neuhaus. And when we arrive at the end we are, I would argue, side-by-side in an appeal for a robust church ready to engage the world with God's truth on multiple levels—well beyond an artificial restriction to things “spiritual.” Smith is right. Through the “formative disciplines and practices” of the church, “God sanctifies our perception so that we can see reality more clearly—that is, in light of revelation and the hope of the world.” So formed, we are sent into the penultimate reality of the culture, “to bear witness to how the world could be otherwise” (224). This, I am convinced, is precisely the task to which Luther would call the church today, and the task that faithful Lutherans should readily shoulder.

There is, obviously, much more that could be said about Smith's lavish serving of ideas, realities, and truth and

their melding in the life of the twenty-first-century church. His thoughtful response to those who would marshal evidence of the church's failure to form through liturgy, the "Godfather problem" (168), needs to be heard and understood by those who champion a sort of magical effect of rote participation in liturgy. And, his drumbeat polemic against "natural law" only persuaded me all the more both of the reality of God's hardwired will for his creation, and the need for a better moniker. Finally, it would be richly satisfying to engage the author in discussions about both the nuances of law and gospel and what Luther actually taught about issues of church and state . . . perhaps another time. While this final volume of Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* project may be different from what has come before, it is a great gift to the church in its own right. In his persistent and persuasive way, Smith compels the reader to rethink much that had been comfortably assumed and to see reality in the church and the world with an enhanced field of vision that is at once wider and more incisive.

Joel Biermann

ECHOES OF SCRIPTURE IN THE GOSPELS. By Richard B. Hays. Baylor University Press, 2017. 524 pages. Paper. \$34.95.

Richard Hays, professor emeritus of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, made his reputation in Pauline studies.

His works include *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (1983, 2nd edition 2002), *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (1989), and *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as an Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (2005). In the second half of his career, he turned his attention to the Gospels. A cancer diagnosis in 2015 lent the impetus for the completion of the present volume. In general, we should thank God (and Hays's editorial team) for bringing this book to publication.

Hays's thesis is simply that the Evangelists were adept readers of Israel's Scriptures and that they repeatedly "read backwards," re-interpreting those books in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In consequence, the Gospels are filled with citations, allusions, and echoes of the Old Testament as they demonstrate, each in their own way, that Jesus's story is the appropriate continuation of Israel's story. This might not seem particularly groundbreaking to the average Missouri Synod pastor, but Hays is not writing for that audience. He is writing for mainstream academics and makes an excellent case.

Hays argues that the Evangelists engage in "figural reading," which he defines as "the discernment of unexpected patterns of correspondence between earlier and later events or persons within a continuous temporal stream" (347). To demonstrate his case, he ranges far and wide through the Scriptures to demonstrate the ways the Evangelists have alluded to them. The effect is that he deepens our appreciation

of very familiar texts.

Here are a few examples from his section on Luke. Discussing the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31), Hays raises the question of the two characters fates. Is it just a rich versus poor thing? Hays notes the significance of Abraham and connects the parable to verbal allusions to Deuteronomy, concluding that the rich man, in disdaining his covenantal duty to care for the poor, has excluded himself from the covenantal family (205–207). Or, talking about the Emmaus scene (Lk 24:13–35), Hays finds verbal echoes with the story of Elisha in Dothan (2 Kgs 6:8–23). Elisha’s servant panics because the city is surrounded by Aramean soldiers, but Elisha prays that his eyes might be opened and he sees the fiery horses and chariots of the Lord all around. Similarly, Cleopas and his companion need to have their eyes opened and their hearts burn within them (Lk 24:31–32). Hays draws several conclusions from this fascinating collocation of texts that would inform several sermons on this very familiar passage (241–243).

Sometimes Hays stretches to find echoes or hints. For example, in a discussion of Acts 4:24–30 (the disciples’ prayer after the release of Peter and John), Hays ranges from Psalm 2, which is explicitly cited in the text, to Psalm 146 to Exodus 20. In this case, one wonders whether these texts are really in the background or if the language he finds echoed is so generic that it could have several antecedents. Either way, he provokes fresh thought.

Other criticisms seem niggling. The book betrays some evidence of its

hurried production. Occasionally, Hays’s paragraphs are not as tightly written as one could hope and he meanders over the same ground. His section on Luke, while stimulating, is not as well written as his sections on Mark and Matthew. The section on John merits some comment, too, because it seems out of character with the foregoing sections. His presentation on John seems to be more a thematic study of John than a “figural reading.” He does some of the same searching for Old Testament antecedents, especially highlighting John’s use of the Psalms, but not nearly so much as for the Synoptics. In his defense, he argues that John approaches things differently (284). And there are those moments when Hays reminds us that he is a mainstream academic: he assumes Markan priority, he is reluctant to talk about Jesus as a historical person, preferring to talk about the Evangelists’ portrayal of Jesus, and he coins a few awkward terms. (Already mentioned is “figural,” but perhaps more difficult is his repeated use of “metalepsis.” Granted Hays defines that term on page 11.)

In summary, Hays has written a very useful book. Scholars may debate his overall thesis and conclusions, but the fresh suggestions he makes over familiar texts would be a blessing to a pastor working through oft-repeated periscopes in the lectionary. One can imagine a pastor checking the index and reading small sections of Hays’s book for inspiration in sermon preparation.

*Douglas J. Stowe
Hartford, Wisconsin*

COSTLY GRACE: An Evangelical Minister's Rediscovery of Faith, Hope, and Love. By Rob Schenck. New York: Harper, 2018. 324 pages. Hardcover. \$15.98.

A leading American evangelical minister—whom public figures long turned to for guidance in faith and politics—recounts his three conversions, from childhood Jewish roots to Christianity, from a pure faith to a highly politicized one, and from the religious right to the simplicity of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

Whether you will appreciate Rob Schenck's *Costly Grace* depends entirely on your point of view as a reader. This three-part life retrospective written by a baby boomer, moral majority belonging, Messianic Jewish, Evangelical political lightning rod is truly something to behold for almost anyone.

On the one hand, if the psychology of religion interests you, Rob's tale of turning to Christ after growing up in a quasi-abusive, addicted, paternally distant home in upstate New York during the sexual revolution of the 1960s is sure to excite. How this coming-of-age conversion story morphs into the passion of entrepreneurial megachurch Christianity of the 1980s with its moral excess in pro-life violence and ending with political power confronted with the moral ambiguity of the Trump White House is thrilling. In this reading, the first part of the story is the most important.

From a different point of view, if

you are historically confused about how the church got to here from there, from Hyannis Port through Kennebunkport to Mar-a-Lago, this could also be a worthwhile read. Here the history of late-twentieth-century evangelical Christianity is narrated from the inside. Most especially, this fifty-year history is humanized. While existential questions of life and death, theocracy and theology were being debated, the fact remains that flawed, flummoxed human beings were essentially making it up as they went along . . . outside abortion clinics and inside federal courtrooms. In this reading, it is the second part of the story that will capture your greatest attention.

Finally, if grieving the chaos caused by Evangelicalism's embrace of Donald J. Trump in the here and now is your sad plight, why not sit down and skim this book. Schenck was at the very center of Evangelical power in its Jerry Falwell heyday. Something happened, however, on his way to the so-called forum. Maybe the author got a conscience. Maybe maturity cast a wiser light on his adolescence. The final section of this book is a narrative of personal, profound reckoning. Schenck confronts the monster in twenty-first-century Republicanism for which he was, in part Dr. Frankenstein. These are his sentiments, by the way. The third and final conversion Schenck narrates informs this reading.

This book is 324-pages long, but the actual reading is much shorter. Most readers will recognize in this autobiography some overlap with their Christian life history. There is a

benefit of reading a book which some might contend is self-promoting, self-absorbed, or self-redeeming. In hearing another's story of how religious fervor met secular (im)morality, we are invited to consider our own life history of the same. In so doing we find new aspects to our confession, along with Christ's absolution. We find new facets to our identity, with a direct benefit to the spouses and children, friends and family that God has entrusted to our care.

*Scott Seidler
Saint Louis, Missouri*

HERETIC: One Scientist's Journey from Darwin to Design. By Matti Leisola & Jonathan Witt. Discovery Institute Press, 2018. 257 pages. Paper. \$16.95.

Matti Leisola, a Finnish Lutheran bioengineer and former dean of Chemistry and Material Sciences at Helsinki University and an expert in enzymes and rare sugars who worked in both academe and industry, exposes in withering detail the scientific weaknesses of the worldview of materialism that underlies the dogma of evolution. *Heretic* is based on a lifetime of work and teaching in the laboratory, interactions with scientific peers, and cogent analysis of methodological materialism.

A reader looking for relevant exegesis of the Genesis accounts of creation and the flood may be disappointed. Leisola is a scientist, and he lets the scientific facts and findings

speak for themselves. He does refer, however, to Johann Kepler's observation that "the laws of nature 'are within the grasp of the human mind' . . . because 'God wanted us to recognize them by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his thoughts'" (228).

The tragedy occurred later. "Christians invented modern science, but a later generation discarded science's fertile theological soil and insisted that science trade only in theories that fit materialism and atheism" (228). In this context, Leisola cites the words of evolutionary biologist, Richard Lewontin: "It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door" (228–229). A rare admission.

Leisola further observes that "methodological materialism poses as 'the scientific method'—empirical, neutral, disinterested. But this isn't the case. It is not a neutral way to observe the world. It dogmatically limits possible answers. The possibility that life has been designed is deemed out of the question" (47).

As for the quasi-religious aspect of evolution, which is firmly grounded in methodological materialism, the author has "discussed evolution with

dozens of colleagues in many parts of the world, and [finds] that very few of them are well acquainted with even the basics of the theory. Most just accept it on faith” (157). As Michael Ruse, an evolutionist who attempts to reconcile evolution with religion, has written, “Evolution is a religion. This was true of evolution in the beginning, and it is true of evolution still today” (46). Thus, the title, *Heretic*, neatly sums up the author’s position in the context of evolution and methodological materialism.

Leisola’s observations and scientific position—based on his work and his experiences with other scientists and even personnel of the Lutheran Church of Finland—may be summarized as follows:

- Unguided, random evolution of even the “simplest” living cell is mathematically impossible. The most refined and sophisticated techniques to support evolutionary theory in the laboratory have yielded no success.
- The “simplest” cell is far more complex than the most complicated computer program.
- The sheer amount of information contained in genetic material foils any attempt to explain its presence outside of intelligent design.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, at least at the official level, has unfortunately thrown its lot in with materialism. (Cf. chapter 7, “The Church Evolves.”)
- Resistance to laboratory findings that support intelligent design is often personal and even threatening,

such that scientists who would support the findings are reluctant to put their jobs and reputations at hazard. (Leisola cites many personal experiences in this regard. Adherents to the theory of evolution and methodological materialism do not tolerate heresy.)

Portions of the book are indeed “heavy” science and heavy going, as the author warns. But the heavy science is foundational to his position: Evolution cannot be supported by science. The author’s own words sum it up: “My journey from Darwin to design has convinced me that the great weight of scientific evidence is against [even] theistic evolution because it is against blind evolution generally” (213). . . . “Far from being a cobbled-together, trial-and-error hack job, the cell is the most sophisticated information system known to man. The expectations of the Intelligent Design scientists were right” (218).

Why are such observations and claims so important? Because uninformed Christians are all too often deceived by the not-so-cunningly devised fables of evolution—and there are many. While Christians have the sure, unchanging word, scientists like Leisola vanquish scientific materialists on their own turf.

David O. Berger

PAUL AND THE PERSON: Reframing Paul's Anthropology. By Susan Grove Eastman. *Eerdmans*, 2017. 223 Pages. Paperback. \$30.00.

The question of “identity” and the “self” has become a new trend in studies of Paul because these topics sidestep some of the dug-in debates between the old and New Perspective. Identity discourse considers Paul from a new platform for productive discourse. The challenge of identity discourse in the New Testament is that there was no concept of “identity,” or the “self” in antiquity in the way we consider it today. Paul certainly conceives of ideas much like identity, but without the explicit term. Eastman’s new book shows that while there was no abstract concept of the “self” in Paul, Paul did see the “person” as an agent that could act and be acted upon which approximates the modern concept of the self. She then applies a “frame” developed from modern neuropsychology to Paul’s language of participation and mimesis to show that Paul recognized that the self was always self-in-relation (to sin, to Christ, to one another). She is particularly interested in the non-volitional aspects of these relationships and she explores the dynamic way that the concept of personal agency can be considered to simultaneously uphold the self while allowing that the ego was never isolated but always defined by what it was in relationship with in Romans 7, Galatians 2, and Philippians 2.

Eastman develops the frame with which she will view Paul through two

innovative platforms. First, she develops the concept of the self-in-relation-to-others through the relatively new science of neuropsychology. She is particularly interested in the way that children respond to, and imitate others in relationship non-volitionally as formative aspects of their own “individual” identity. She argues that there is no person who lives truly independently. All persons’ identities are instead both embodied and embedded in the world around them as the self-in-relation-to-others. This dynamic does not deny that there is a sense of an individual, but that the individual is connected to and even defined by that which he or she interacts. It is a mimetic relationship where the self is defined by the other through practice. Second, she applies this framework from neuropsychology to the Stoic Epictetus (AD 55–135). She finds that the Stoic concept of the self as intertwined with its participation in the “god” of the universe, which is simultaneously non-volitional and maintains a dynamic of agency so that the “god” and the Stoic are equally agents of action. Eastman is careful to point out that she is not claiming that Paul is using modern concepts of identity, nor that Paul was a Stoic. She further argues that she will not anachronistically use these concepts to explain Paul, but that it simply provides a window through which we can consider Paul, and she notes that there are some similarities between what Paul is doing and what new insights from neuropsychology and Stoicism can provide.

Eastman rightly points out that Paul did not define “personhood.” However,

she uses Stoic thought to show that there was a strong interest in humans as agents. Either they acted or were acted upon individually, and thereby were seen as either having autonomy or not. This was not just a fact of life but it was widely discussed as a central topic of inquiry, often through the rhetoric of the individual's ability to have "choice" and how that related to human suffering and flourishing. The question of agency then, was a discourse about the individual person.

She then argues that the self in antiquity was viewed from a "second-person perspective." She argues that there was no idea of a self that set itself completely apart and was objectively observing the goings-on of the world (third-person perspective), nor any idea of a solipsistic world where an individual self was divided in a kind of existential angst that sought to unite the ego (first-person perspective). Instead, she argues that the self was always understood as self-in-relation-to-others. The "other" could be other people in the physical realm, suprahuman forces, or even a suprahuman force that was inhabiting a person internally. Eastman then brings up questions about agency (her definition of self): If the other is affecting the self, then are the actions mine or the other's? She argues that Paul did not think this simply—it was not an issue of either the agency of the self or the other. Instead, it was always—even non-volitionally—combined. Therefore, she sees the dialogue of Romans 7 to be addressing this question. Is it Paul who is acting or is the force of Sin? She

argues that Paul can be both captive to the power of Sin and complicit in Sin's actions—even if he volitionally desires not to sin, he still does. The "I" is never erased by the power of Sin, but it is dominated. In the same way, in Galatians 2, directly after "Christ lives in me" in which he supplants his own agency, he immediately says, "I live" thereby restoring it. Eastman makes this claim by seeing agency in a more complex way than simply one or another. Instead, it is always in relationship.

The drive of Eastman's book is in her theology of mimesis and participation. She shows, particularly well in Philippians 2, that the self is always in mimetic relationship with another. The self will find and participate in the other so that the other forms and unites with them. She develops this from earlier studies wherein Paul relates to his converts; he calls them to be "imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Eastman's earlier book, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Eerdmans, 2006), considers the way that Paul has a theology that is embodied—he is in his body the bearer of the gospel. Therefore, his converts imitate and are in relationship with him in order to be in the gospel. The idea is that by being in relationship, we are being formed.

Eastman's contribution is fresh, readable, and brings up an important point about Paul's concept of self. The main criticism is that while she has rightly emphasized agency as an aspect of the self, she has looked too narrowly on that one question to the neglect of

others. For Paul, the self is more than simple agency. There is an inherent setting of humans into groups (Jew, Gentile) and their place on the earth in relationship to cosmic forces (Sin, Death, Grace, and Life) which are well beyond human agency. It is for this reason she struggles to explain Romans 7, which seems to challenge the very agency that she depends upon: “the good that I would, I do not.” If Paul is not in control of his actions, then does he really have agency? Furthermore, she does not consider carefully Paul’s language of slavery that brings up a different perspective. Further, while Eastman is right that agency is an aspect of the person, her structure of the self as self-in-relation-to-others as universal for antiquity is too wide-ranging a claim.

It works well if the self is primarily an “agent”—an agent either acts upon or is acted upon by another. One could imagine, for example, Middle Platonists defining the person less as an “agent” and thereby challenging this universality of self-in-relation. However, this does not counteract the value of her study. Eastman brings up an important element of the self for Paul. What is more, her concept of the self-in-relation opens up new and exciting questions for all readers of Paul. I therefore recommend this title as it presents a new way of thinking about Paul that deserves further exploration.

*Benjamin Nickodemus
Saint Louis, Missouri*

**Video based.
Bible backed.
Author created.**

CPH FaithCourses—where students of the Word
dive deeper into Bible study
and grow in their faith.



Browse courses at
cphfaithcourses.com



1.800.325.3040

© 2018 Concordia Publishing House



Concordia Seminary
801 Seminary Place
St. Louis, MO 63105

