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Editor's Note

In Philip Jenkins's provocative *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: 2002/2011), he describes shifts in Christianity that continue to bear out: "In 1900, 83 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America. In 2050, 72 percent of Christians will live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America . . . by 2030 at the latest, Africa will have more Catholics than Europe." These shifts are reflected in Lutheranism as well, with some of the largest and fastest growing Lutheran populations occurring in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Indonesia, even while our own church denomination steadily declines.

Theologically, Martin Luther knew such shifts were nearly inevitable, comparing the movement of the gospel to a *Platzregen*, a momentary downpour which moves to where faith receives it: "For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been . . . You Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay" (LW 45, 352). But Luther's *Platzregen* is not a fatalistic interpretation of demographic realities. It is a call to repent from the idea that the gospel is ever married to a particular culture or people, that salvation comes as some national or ethnic birthright.

The good news is that Christianity itself is not in decline. But for the western church, this geographic and cultural shift does bring new, inescapable challenges even as it affords us new possibilities. One possibility is the gift that non-western expressions of the Christian faith can be for western churches. The value of community, new eyes for the poor and the oppressed, ethical urgencies in the midst of social and political fragmentation—all of these come to us from the Global South with the potential to breathe the Spirit's life into our *Lebenswelt*.

Two of our articles are aimed precisely at opening us to such a possibility. Samuel Deressa (Concordia University, St. Paul) has allowed us to publish the paper he gave at our most recent Multiethnic Symposium, *The West and the Rest*, where he helped us consider the promise of this reality for Lutherans in particular. Our own William Schumacher casts his nets a bit wider and models what a careful ear can glean from the church in Africa. Without spoiling the article, it does combine insights from Emmanuel Katongole with an image of Richard Dreyfus and a pile of mashed potatoes.

Even as the church grows and stretches in unique ways in the south, our work here is not finished. In these pages we remember the faithful work of Dean Hempelmann, former professor, pastor, and churchman who now rests from his labors. We have also printed the inaugural address of our new president, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Egger, which lays out a vision for our work at this Lutheran seminary for the formation of pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars, and leaders in service to the church around the

world. In a similar vein, we have printed Dale Meyer's review essay of Dan Aleshire's recent book, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* (Eerdmans, 2021).

Finally, a few remarks at the "changing of the guard." After serving as dean for the past eight years, Dr. Charles Arand requested to step down from this administrative roll to concentrate more on his writing and teaching. Under his leadership the *Concordia Journal* received a thorough redesign which, alongside Concordiatheology.org, garnered more than fifteen awards from the Associated Church Press and the Evangelical Press Association. Concordia Seminary Press published five new books, including the launching of a new series, "Conversations in Preaching." Arand reconfigured the department of Continuing Education with a new director who has established new opportunities and partnerships, including the Faith and Film festival and a spring Multiethnic Symposium that has grown as strong as the Theological Symposium in the fall. Arand's collaborative spirit and joyful desire to serve the church continues to be a blessing to the seminary even as he takes up new roles and opportunities.

Personally I am grateful for his leadership, indefatigable curiosity, and friendship. It is a privilege and joy for me to follow him as the dean of Theological Research and Publications, to help the seminary resource our pastors and lay people with what our first dean, William Schumacher, called "the vigorous life of the mind in service to the Gospel." In that spirit we look forward to a bright future of promoting Lutheran theology that is confessional and compelling, biblical and beautiful, faithful to the church and fitting for our time.

Erik Herrmann
Dean of Theological Research and Publications

Foundation, Formation, and Beautification: The Work of Concordia Seminary

Good afternoon, and greetings to all of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

My family, my friends, and colleagues here at the seminary and across the church, neighbors and civic leaders, representatives from the Synod, from our sister seminary, and from our Concordia universities, seminary regents, retired presidents from both of our seminaries, students, and former students—thank you for marking this occasion with us, and thank you for the privilege of addressing you. Your presence today is a joy and an encouragement to me, and to our whole seminary community.

Time marches on. We have our day, our season, to do what the Lord places in our hands to do. Just a short time, but a significant time, under God's providence and purpose. Time marches on. Just a few years ago, we observed the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In 2029, we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Small Catechism. In 2030, of the Augsburg Confession, and the year after that, of the Apology.

Closer to hand, on July 4, 2026, America will mark 250 years of independence. And 2026 will be a milestone year for Concordia Seminary as well. Exactly three weeks before Independence Day—June 13, 2026—will be 100 years since the dedication of this sturdy, beautiful campus.

It was an undertaking when our forefathers set about to construct this place. Rome wasn't built in a day, and our campus wasn't either. They broke ground in January 1924 and dedicated the mostly completed campus in June 1926. It took about two and a half years. First, all the earthmoving and excavation and foundations. Then the buildings were given shape and form, stone by stone, timber by timber, shingle by shingle. And along the way and long afterward, attention to beauty, in the design and decoration of the buildings and symbolic images, furnishings, fountains, flowers, and trees.

For my address this afternoon, I would like to work from this analogy, the analogy of *building*, to reflect on our vital mission here at Concordia of

Editor's note

President Thomas J. Egger gave his inaugural address at the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus, Concordia Seminary, on August 27, 2021.

preparing students to serve Christ and his church and his world. I will talk about the foundation. I will talk about shaping and formation. And I will talk about beautification. Foundation, formation, beautification—not of stone buildings, but of the living stones, the men and women whom the church entrusts to our instruction.

I. The Foundation

First—and so you don't lose heart along the way, let me say now, the longest part of this speech—the foundation.

At Concordia Seminary, I thank God that our faculty, our church body, and our supporters are wonderfully united in this crucial commitment: that the word of God is the unshakeable foundation of our work. The Holy Scriptures, the inspired, unbreakable, prophetic, and apostolic witness of the Old and New Testaments, this source of heavenly wisdom which reveals to us Jesus Christ and the gospel of life: Upon this we are building, even as we ourselves are being built.

The seminary's first president, C. F. W. Walther, once declared: "In this house, neither the word of man nor the wit and wisdom of man, but rather the word of God and the entire word of God, and that which serves the elucidation and application of that word, shall be studied with unwearied diligence, day after day, from the first rays of the morning until late after nightfall."¹ In the same vein, seminary president Ralph Bohlmann wrote that, throughout its history, "Concordia Seminary has been a very special kind of 'seed plot.' There the seed has consciously and consistently been the word of God, in all its truth, purity, and power—not the notions of men."² After 183 years of history, during which all too many seminaries around us have tragically let go of this confidence, we thank those who have preceded us, and we thank God that an enduring confidence in the Scriptures has been passed on to us. And we, too, will endeavor to remain upon this same foundation.

To the Torah and to the testimony!³ The foundation of Holy Scripture is, for us, not something different than the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and of God's creation and redemption of the world in him. For us, the foundation is not Scripture *or* Christ, but Scripture *and* Christ—Christ *and* Scripture. For God has spoken to us by his Son, whom the prophets declare and to whom the apostles bear witness. The Lord Christ himself directs us again and again to the word of God by his example and exhortation. And in and through this word, Jesus himself is truly manifest and present with his people to the end of the age. Scripture and Christ—Christ and Scripture.

Jesus said: "Everyone then who hears these *words of mine* and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been *founded* on the rock."⁴

And St. Paul writes: "You are . . . members of the household of God, built on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"

(Eph 2:19b–20). Scripture and Christ—Christ and Scripture.

The Scriptures must be read and used rightly. We hear them and meditate on them with one another and with the church. We read the Scriptures with Christ and his saving work and promise at the center. The Scriptures must be read and used rightly. But to know and use the Scriptures rightly, we must read the Scriptures. They must be the foundation of our own theological work, and of our work with our students. Blessed is the man who meditates on God’s word “day and night,” the psalmist declares (Ps 1:1–2). As Walther put it, “with unwearied diligence, day after day, from the first rays of the morning until late after nightfall.”

There is darkness in our world, distress and anguish and gloom. We live in an age and a culture that seem increasingly lost and aimless and dark, even sometimes within the church and within our own hearts. But the dawn of our world has already come; the dayspring from on high, the true sun is shining. From “the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Is 9:1b–2). And so Isaiah appeals to us: “To the Torah and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (Is 8:20).

St. Peter echoes the same theme, directing us to sure testimony of the apostles and prophets: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . . We ourselves heard [the] voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pt 1:16, 18–19).

The great eighteenth-century Lutheran exegete Johann Albrecht Bengel famously connected the church’s health to its attentiveness to Scripture. Bengel wrote: “Scripture is the foundation of the church: the church is the guardian of Scripture. When the church is in strong health, the light of Scripture shines bright; when the church is sick, Scripture is corroded by neglect; and thus it happens, that the outward form of Scripture and that of the church usually seem to exhibit simultaneously either health or else sickness; and as a rule the way in which Scripture is treated is in exact correspondence with the condition of the church.”⁵

Our seminary library, a world-class theological library, contains over 270,000 books. And if our professors would ever, all at the same time, turn in all the books that they currently have checked out from the library, that number might double! A quarter of a million books is a lot of books. In the course of our work here, we interact with many, many books. We assign many books for our students to read; we spend time discussing them in our classes. There is much knowledge and wisdom to be gained through books.

Yet one book is, for us, in a category of its own. The Book, the Bible, is the foundation. Martin Luther, himself a voracious reader and a voluminous writer of books, nevertheless cautioned that the writings of men must not overshadow the word of God. The *time* that we spend on our own writing and the time that we spend reading other books—not to mention consuming digital media!—must not crowd out the time that we spend reading and studying the words of the Bible itself.

In the 1539 preface to his German writings, Luther acknowledges: “For neither councils, fathers, nor we (even if it can come to the highest and best attempt) will do as well as the holy scripture—that is, God himself—has done . . . As such, we must let the prophets and apostles sit on the lectern, and we here below at their feet must hear what they say, and not say what they must hear.”⁶

This posture of humble hearing and humble discipleship—this Christian and Lutheran posture—does not go without saying. Our own hearts often impede us, puffed up with satisfaction in our own knowledge, our own reasonableness, and seduced by the desire to always be conversant in what is new and novel. The devil is a real and formidable foe, and he whispers his “Did God really say?” and his “Here is the real path to knowledge” to us, just as he did to our first parents.

Even voices from within the church would supplant our strong foundation with something shifting. Two decades ago, the Lutheran Bishop Krister Stendahl delivered an essay with the provocative title: “Dethroning Biblical Imperialism in Theology.”⁷ Reflect on that title for a moment: “Dethroning Biblical Imperialism in Theology.” He was appealing to the church that she become more accustomed to and more confident in asserting that the Bible is not always good and reliable, should not always have the final say in our teaching and our convictions, and at times must be corrected and overruled by truths that we arrive at on other grounds.

Or consider the posture of ELCA theologian Terence Fretheim, an Old Testament scholar from whom I’ve learned much, but whose convictions regarding the reliability and authority of the Bible are troubling. Fretheim writes: “A myth of certainty about the Bible has often been current among us, that amid the rough seas the church and its Bible are having to endure, at least some things on the ship are tied down—like God. Even if the Bible is not fully reliable when it speaks of scientific or historical matters,” Fretheim continues, “can we not say with certainty that the Bible speaks the truth on all matters of faith and life? Or more particularly, on all matters of theology, ethics, and piety? I wish it were so.”⁸

Elsewhere, Fretheim writes: “There are some [biblical] statements about God (as well as other matters) to which the reader simply has to say No! Readers can no longer simply trust everything the Bible says, about God as well as about other matters . . .”⁹

But this is not the teaching of Jesus, or of the Bible itself, or of Luther, or of our Lutheran Confessions. What we confess about our Triune God and about ourselves

we confess from the Scriptures. To all that the Bible teaches us, to everything of which it bears witness, we say, “Yes. Amen. It is so.” This posture of humble discipleship beneath the prophets and apostles undergirds our entire mission and vocation here. This is the posture adopted by our Lutheran Confessions, our *Concordia*. This was the conviction that I was taught by my professors here at this seminary. This is the conviction of my faculty colleagues. And, God help us, we will pass this conviction on to the next generation of pastors, deaconesses, missionaries, scholars, and leaders for our church.

Yes, we can learn from human wisdom, and we do. But just as the Bible teaches us a priority of obedience—we must obey God before men—so also, we observe a priority of listening, a priority of discipleship, a priority of credence. We must listen first and foremost to God’s word and trust it above all. The gospel itself, our eternal hope and salvation, resounds with this priority of listening and trust:

“Let God be true, and every human being a liar.”¹⁰

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (Rom 8:33–34a).

“How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? . . . If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. . . . But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:12–13, 20).

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

I have spent a lot of time on this first point, the foundation of our work. Maybe it seems trite to some, or clichéd. To simply affirm the central and authoritative place of Scripture leaves all kinds of questions of canon and text and interpretation and application and the relationship between the testaments and so forth. That’s true. And I have not laid out the critical benefits to the church of a ministerium that studies the Scriptures in the original languages of the prophets (Hebrew) and the apostles (Greek). We are firmly committed to that as well, and that is its own speech. Instead, I have sought to affirm something simple but crucial. Our seminary motto is well-put: Light from above. And as we reflect on the heart of our work and the reason for our existence as a school, the summons of Isaiah really is foundational. To the Torah and to the testimony! Listen to the Spirit-inspired authors of the Bible. Listen to the prophets and the apostles. They must sit on our lecterns, and we and our students sit down below and listen to them.

That is the foundation. And now, some more cursory remarks on formation and beautification.

II. Formation

As we work with our students, our aim is certainly broader than simply conveying information or teaching them the how-tos of ministry. We are also tasked with the tall

order of shaping men and women, actually forming who they are in their character, dispositions, disciplines and habits, relationships, and above all, in their faith in Christ and their conscious identity in him and as a part of his church.

In his recent book *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*, Daniel Aleshire points to this formative dimension of pastoral preparation as an essential focus for theological schools moving forward. To illustrate the need for such formation, Aleshire cites a broad study measuring contemporary views about the honesty and ethics of clergy. Over the last fifteen years, the number of Americans rating the ethical standards of Christian pastors as very high or high has fallen twenty points, to a figure significantly less than half of respondents. Of course, any number of factors may play into this trend. But it would be foolish to simply dismiss one obvious implication of the study: that we should aim to prepare honest and ethical pastors. In addition to academic preparation and professional competence, Aleshire argues, seminaries should reflect on what practices will “cultivate moral maturity, relational integrity, and spiritual maturity” in students.¹¹ He connects this emphasis with the medieval language of a theological and pastoral *habitus*.

In the first volume of his *Christian Dogmatics*, Francis Pieper speaks of the importance of forming such a *habitus*. Here Pieper includes personal faith in Christ and the common Christian virtues; the humility and discipline to confine one’s teaching entirely to the word of God, but also the industry and ability to teach the whole word of God, the entire truth of Scripture; the aptness, courage, and sense of duty to refute false teaching; and “the willingness and strength to suffer” for the sake of Christ.¹²

Such personal shaping does not automatically flow from the academic study of theology, although the subjects taught at seminary certainly should have formative power. Aleshire notes that “the subjects that theological schools teach have an intrinsic formative power, but the way they are taught . . . can fail to exploit that power.” He goes on to explain, “[The] learning [of sacred] texts is incomplete if it is not influenced by the goodness they teach. The academic study of Scripture is the starting point in a theological school, but could it not be accompanied with the invitation to let the text form the learner as a religious person? This invitation will require the prompting of the professor, the willingness of the student to live in the text, and *sufficient time* for students to let the text stir their souls.”¹³ Those are Aleshire’s words.

If we care about the shape of our buildings, we should care about the personal shape and character of our students, and we should care about how our teaching is contributing to that personal formation. This emphasis, to a greater or lesser extent, has been a part of our Lutheran tradition and our seminary’s tradition all along.

John Maxfield, in his book on Luther’s Genesis lectures, gives us a glimpse inside Luther’s Wittenberg lecture hall. Maxfield writes: “For Luther, lecturing on the Bible was not simply or primarily an exercise in philology or mere grammar. . . .

Rather, engaging the holy scripture is itself a spiritual exercise in which speaker and hearer are both confronted by the word of God, which must be *loved*—that is, must become identified with one’s own experience of life and not read with scholarly detachment.”¹⁴

For Luther, classroom study of God’s truths should form a person. “Let us be and remain pupils,” he encouraged his students, “and let us not change the word of God; we ourselves should be changed through the word.”¹⁵

Here at Concordia Seminary, one of Dr. Walther’s students would later recall his “spontaneous witness of grace inside and outside the instruction periods.” He writes: “Walther appeared in full and matchless power in the so-called Luther hours which he held weekly with the entire student body. Here he *changed hearts* with his testimony of grace and *produced preachers of grace*.”¹⁶

Francis Pieper, apparently, had an even greater reputation for shaping persons and hearts. Dr. Theodore Nickel, himself a former student of Pieper’s, writes: “When students and pastors who had Pieper as a professor would speak about their days as his students, they would refer not so much to his person, but to the fact that he made you love Christ. This was Pieper’s greatest power: he always brought God’s grace to bear upon your life. When students spoke of Dr. Pieper, they would say, ‘When you think of him, you think of Christ.’ He became a picture of God’s grace walking in his classroom.”¹⁷

This was my own experience as a student at this seminary—with many of my professors, none of whom were Walther or Pieper, by the way. And I hope that this continues to be the experience of our students today.

Over the last decade, as we have designed and implemented a new curriculum, we have given more deliberate thought to personal and spiritual formation. It is, in some of its parts at least, a new endeavor for us. Although not brand new, for as we’ve said, the goal of shaping a personal and theological *habitus* runs throughout our tradition.

Still, in my mind, our improvement in student formation continues to be work in progress, and I hope, over the coming years, to encourage continuing discussion and exploration among our faculty of new ideas and efforts, and especially of resources within our Lutheran theology that can guide and enrich our efforts to form the person of our students—scriptural, Lutheran emphases such as:

- Confession and absolution—dying and rising with Christ.
- *Oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*—prayer, study, and struggle—that form a theologian.
- The formative power of the living and active word of God, heard “for me” in both chapel and classroom.
- The faith-forming and identity-forming power of core texts: Small Catechism, familiar liturgies, enduring hymns, classic prayers.

- Habituation. That which we ask our students to do repeatedly, that which we do alongside them repeatedly, this shapes their character, faith, priorities, loves, disciplines. Is it any surprise that habits impact our students' *habitus*? What habits are we intentionally forming with our students, in our students, during their time here?
- Imitation. Aleshire notes the obvious here: "Student character is nourished by faculty character."¹⁸ To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became *imitators* of us and of the Lord." To the Philippians, he wrote: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things." And the writer to the Hebrews encourages: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate* their faith." Imitation is one of the strongest dimensions of student formation. How, then, does this realization inform to the kind of faculty we are seeking to add? The value of faculty living on campus and sharing community life with students? The importance of excellent vicarage supervisors? The way we go about teaching the Bible and church history? In all of this, we should be aware that we are shaping our students by giving them people to identify with and to imitate, alongside the perfect example of our Lord Jesus.

III. Beautification

Finally, the third and shortest part of this speech: Beautification. What would the Concordia Seminary campus be like without the lawns, flowers, trees, fountains, archways, tower, stained glass, and so forth? As we carry out our work, as we build on the sure foundation of God's word, as we seek to form and shape the person of our students, let us also attend to instilling in them the beauty of Christ. In ordination vows, pastors promise, with God's help, to "adorn" the gospel and the Office of the Holy Ministry with their lives. The person of our students, their disposition, their qualities, their way of life, will be seen by those inside the church and by those outside the church. Let us instill in them, with God's grace and help, that which is beautiful. The beauty of love, the beauty of self-sacrifice, of humility, of contentment, of generosity, of brotherly unity, of joy in Christ, and of hope.

The world is filled with ugliness. More and more, prominent voices in the culture around us succeed in branding Christianity as a religion of exclusion, self-righteousness, and hate. As something ugly. It should not surprise us. In Isaiah's days, he addressed "those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Is 5:20). And Jesus forewarned, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:20).

But Jesus is beautiful. And if we are to be despised, and if our students are to bear reproach for Christ's sake, let us do so while exhibiting lives that are beautiful. Not

outward beauty of hair or jewelry or clothing. But a Spirit-worked beauty of person, of heart, of life. Peter's exhortation to wives can apply to all Christians: "Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Pt 3:4).

As we build here at this seminary, let us care about such beauty. For our life together inside the church has not always been beautiful, and it won't always be. But when it is, it is a priceless gift to the whole world.

We must treasure both of these things: yes, a willingness to stand for and contend for the truth, but also a commitment to do so in genuine humility, patience, and love. Dr. Walther, in his day, warned of the danger of contending for the truth without love, patience, and a welcome of others. False teaching and compromise are real threats to the church, but Walther also spoke of "an equally dreadful danger . . . of a pharisaic, carnal, spiritually proud, loveless insistence on strict" teaching which would "scare [people] off as from a prison tower of the spirit and of faith."¹⁹

Back in 1970, when there was great controversy in our synod and at our seminary, the Presbyterian theologian Dr. Francis Schaeffer addressed a group of Missouri Synod pastors and leaders. He urged them to stand fast for historic, biblical truth. But he stressed that this must also be done in love and with love, and that they must hold fast to both orthodoxy of teaching and also to what he called "orthodoxy of community." Conservatives have often placed too "little emphasis on community." Schaeffer said, "By the grace of God the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community. . . . An exhibition of the love of God in practice is beautiful and it must be there. . . . If we show either of these without the other, we do not exhibit the character of God but a caricature of God for the world to see. If we stress only the love of God without the holiness of God, it turns out only to be compromise. If, on the other hand, we stress the holiness of God without the love of God, we practice something that is hard, something that lacks beauty. And beauty is an important thing to show forth before a lost world, before our generation."²⁰

Indeed. God help us, then, to send forth into the church and world graduates who are founded and formed in such a way that the striking beauty of Christ and his love are manifested in their lives.

Conclusion

What a privilege the Lord God has given to Concordia Seminary. What a blessing to live and work every day in such a beautiful place, amidst these stately buildings which literally resound with the truths of God and the gospel of Christ. And what blessing that God brings men and women to study here, and that he allows us to share in the work of establishing them on the foundation of Christ and the Scriptures and the work of forming their very persons, so that they might live before the world with the beauty and hope of Christ Jesus.

Martin Luther found enormous satisfaction in the privilege of teaching future pastors. He once said that when the day of his death came, he would not be afraid, and he would pray with Simeon, “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace.” For, Luther observed, “The word of God and the true worship of God will remain among those students whom I leave behind when I die; and . . . my students will be the cause of salvation for the whole world.”²¹

Time marches on, my friends. God give us health and strength to do this work in our day, in our season. Until we rest from our labors, and others take up the task in our place.

Thank you for your time. And thank you for the great honor and the high calling of serving as the new president of Concordia Seminary.

Thomas J. Egger
President

Endnotes

- 1 From C. F. W. Walther's address at the September 9, 1883, dedication of the newly constructed Concordia Seminary campus on Jefferson Avenue, cited from Friedrich Bente, "Walthers Verdienst um das Sola Scriptura," *Lehre und Wehre* 57 (1911): 167–168, my translation.
- 2 Ralph A. Bohlmann, introduction to *Light for Our World: Essays Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri*, ed. John W. Klotz (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1989), 3.
- 3 The Scripture reading for the inauguration ceremony was Isaiah 8:11–9:7. The summons "To the Torah and to the testimony!" is from Isaiah 8:20.
- 4 Matthew 7:24–25. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
- 5 John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Andrew R. Fausset, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1858), 1:7. Cited from Arthur Drevlow, ed. *C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther* (Mankato, MN.: Walther Press, 1987), 131–132.
- 6 Cf. AE 34:284. Cited in and translated by John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 12.
- 7 Krister Stendahl, "Dethroning Biblical Imperialism in Theology," in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Helsinki*, ed. Heikki Räisänen, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, R. S. Sugirtharajah, Krister Stendahl, and James Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 61–68.
- 8 Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 99. This book is a dialogue and debate between Fretheim and Froehlich, and the quotations above are from Fretheim alone.
- 9 Fretheim, *The Bible as Word*, 61.
- 10 Romans 3:4, my translation.
- 11 Daniel O. Aleshire, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 139.
- 12 Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:46–51.
- 13 Aleshire, *Beyond Profession*, 123.
- 14 Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 18.
- 15 AE 3:297
- 16 Arthur Drevlow, "Walther as Others Saw Him," in *C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther*, 46, emphasis added. The student was August Pieper, Francis's younger brother, who became a leading exegetical scholar and seminary professor in the Wisconsin Synod.
- 17 Armand J. Boehme and Theodore F. Nickel, "Foreword: Walther's Lasting Legacy," in *C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther*, vii.
- 18 Aleshire, *Beyond Profession*, 116.
- 19 C. F. W. Walther, *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Volume 3: Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre"*, ed. August R. Suelflow, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 41.
- 20 Francis A. Schaeffer, "A Protestant Evangelical Speaks to His Lutheran Friends in a Day of Theological Crisis," in *Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church*, ed. Erich Kiehl and Waldo J. Werning (Chicago: Lutheran Congress, 1970), 143.
- 21 AE 3:120.

In Memoriam: L. Dean Hempelmann

It was a church in Rosebud, Missouri, under a pastor whose linkage went back to Bugenhagen, to which L. Dean Hempelmann could trace his roots. Dean was formed in the evangelical Lutheranism that would shape his life and ministry into God's service to synod and seminary within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and far beyond, including service as a chaplain in the USAF Reserves.

Our paths first crossed at the opening service of Concordia Seminary in 1978, where, as a veteran pastor, he was installed as director of admissions and ministerial recruitment, and I was installed as a very green rookie instructor in exegetical theology. Little did we know how closely we would work together as colleagues and friends, as faculty, administrators, deans, theological and pastoral educators, and in parish ministry as well.

Here was another example of an experienced pastor leaving a joy-filled parish ministry to serve the larger church as the seminary continued to rebuild. Within a year, Dean joined the faculty itself as an effective teacher of pastoral theology, capable across the full gamut of courses and skill sets and teaching across the department as folks were pressed to do in those days. He would also join the pastoral staff at Christ Memorial congregation, where he provided leadership to the evangelism program, helped revitalize a Bible study program, and provided seasoned wisdom all around.

Dean was an excellent teacher, both to seminarians and in congregational contexts as well. For him, as for St Paul, to “teach” (*didaskein*) engaged the proclamation of the gospel in all its parts, which is at the heart of pastoral ministry. He cared about what he taught and those to whom he taught, always modeling the responsibilities and joys of pastoral ministry, grounded in God's word and seasoned with personal care.

Dean was a scholar. He taught pastoral theology from the Greek text of Paul's letters to the saints of the early church and to his younger colleagues, Timothy and Titus. His doctoral work at Saint Louis University was an important study of pastoral ministry within life and history of the church and, as a side effect, opened up collegial conversations between our seminary and the Jesuits at SLU. He never grew tired of the important need to anchor one's teaching in research and knowledge, always back to the word of God.

Dean was an outstanding administrator. His skills were quickly affirmed at Concordia Seminary, where he held various posts, including acting president in the interim before John Johnson filled that void. As academic dean, he showed support for faculty as the heartbeat and lifeblood of the seminary yet also managed

the administrative details with precision and timeliness. He was instrumental in organizing and then leading a comprehensive “curriculum review and design” process that took four years and culminated in a first stage of major revisions and updates that set the direction of the seminary for the next decade.

His leadership at Concordia Seminary yielded to the larger church in 1993, when Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton called him to become the third president of that still young institution. President Hempelmann brought mature and steady leadership and vision over the course of six significant years. Most notably he led the review process that moved the seminary from associate to full membership and unqualified accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools, an arduous process that involves detailed work within the institution and its communities as well as knowledge and understanding of the ATS standards and procedures. He also established a new Missionary Study Centre that sought to keep this important focus of our Lord’s mission ever in view.

And then, after Edmonton, he came back to us with an even broader understanding of theological education in the service of the church to begin his important work as director of pastoral education for the LCMS. Dean always had his eye on the ball, knew his goals, knew—and cared about—those who needed to work together to accomplish them, and somehow he got the right people together to do just that. He was a model of keeping one’s balance between the tasks at hand and the care and respect for the people also at hand to do them.

Dean was a churchman. I witnessed his vision in seeking to help our seminaries and universities work cooperatively and collegially. There were so many times in the academic “deans with Dean” meetings between myself and my counterpart at the Ft. Wayne seminary in which he fostered common cause with integrity and wisdom. He worked closely with the pre-seminary and theological faculties of the Concordia University System schools, holding high the standard of pre-seminary preparation that remained from the “old system” even as contemporary currents created a complexity of competing interests. He fostered a collegium across those increasingly distanced and isolated departments as partners with each other and together with both seminaries, efforts that revived a long-abandoned desire to bring us all together in a now-regularized “LCMS Theology Professors’ Conference.”

Dean was a husband, father, and grandfather, who nurtured his family with love, Christian leadership and integrity. He married his grade-school sweetheart Cathy, his only classmate for all eight years at Immanuel Lutheran School, Rosebud. He loved to laugh, and he had that infectious giggle that he could keep hidden behind the serious nature of the task at hand until it broke forth in joyful reminder to take ourselves a bit less seriously.

Above all, Dean was a pastor, who knew his Lord and Savior and followed God’s will and God’s ways into his own work and his own walk, always remembering that

it is Christ's work, and Christ's rock upon which we stand. His vocation, grounded in parish service to God's people, always surrounded and served the pastoral ministry. His life was truly a "doxological response" (a phrase we learned from Martin Franzmann) in which the gospel joy fills every moment of every day. In the end, as at the beginning, Dean was a baptized child of God. He loved to hear the gospel of salvation, he loved to tell the story, he loved to hear of Jesus. Again and again, it was ever new and life-giving. And now, even in death, Christ has given him that life that does not die.

Rest in peace, dear Dean! For us, you have gone to sleep too soon and too suddenly, with so much left to live. But you have shown us a pastor's heart and a pastor's life. We can hear the voice of our Master saying, "well done, good and faithful servant."

Andrew Bartelt
Professor Emeritus

Articles

A Little Theological Eavesdropping¹

William W. Schumacher



William W. Schumacher is mission professor of historical theology, director of the Institute for Mission Studies, and the Buehner-Duesenberg Professor of Missions at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

He has served as chair of the Department of Historical Theology, and as dean of Theological Research and Publication (2006–2012). Before joining the Seminary in 1996, Schumacher served as a missionary in Botswana, Africa (1985–1995). He has taught and lectured internationally in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. His most recent book publication is *Who Do I Say That You Are?: Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa* (Wipf and Stock Publishers).

This essay is missiological in the sense that it tries to grasp something of the *missio Dei*, to see a bit more clearly what God is up to in the world, and to reflect on how he involves his people in that mission and work. On the other hand, this essay does not attempt to provide any specific evangelistic strategy or technique. This is certainly *not* because evangelism is unimportant or unnecessary. The direct, winsome, urgent appeal to unbelievers—exhorting sinners to repent, and extending God’s promise of salvation to all so that they may believe—remains central to the church’s life. But these

present reflections are directed at something else, namely to an effort to understand the church’s place in, relationship to, and responsibility for the world. God’s relation to the world (which is, of course, *prior* to the church’s relation and the source of it) is emphatically not limited to what we might consider “spiritual” concerns but embraces all aspects of his creation and his human creatures. This comprehensive divine embrace has implications for our human life, for the church’s life.

Our shared understanding of these things has perceptibly changed in American society and elsewhere in the West. The change has been variously described: rising secularism, religious pluralism, the end of Christendom, and so on. The perception

of the role of Christianity and the Christian church in the world has changed both for Christians and for those outside the faith. What matters more than a particular label is the fact that a great many Christians and non-Christians today sense that the church no longer exerts the same influence in the culture that it once did, that Christianity as a whole has lost much of the respect and status it once enjoyed. Non-Christians who regard Christianity as having a net negative influence on human flourishing may welcome this change, while for many Christians the shift causes alarm, grief, or even something akin to panic. This essay is intended, in a small but perhaps suggestive way, to assuage that grief and allay that panic.

What I want to do here is to *eavesdrop* on some African theology, theology that can help us ruminate about the church and its relationship to the world. My theological mind (such as it is) has been formed by my reading of African theologians. For my present purpose I will draw on and develop some thoughts of the Ugandan Roman Catholic theologian Emmanuel Katongole.²

I have been privileged to listen in on theological conversations in which Africans have been trying to figure out the church's place in the world, the church's relationship to (and responsibility for) the world, and how the church survives and flourishes as a community. Those are questions that matter urgently today, in our own denomination, in our own society, as well as in distant, developing societies in Africa. When I learn in this way from African theologians like Katongole, I am engaged in what I call *theological eavesdropping*, a term not original to me. By using that term I mean that I am listening in on voices from a far place, overhearing a conversation not intended for me. Such eavesdropping has been extremely helpful to me, and I hope I can convince you that it will be helpful to you, as well.

At the outset, it will be helpful to plant in your mind an image borrowed from a popular film. A famous scene from the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) depicts Roy Neary, an electrical lineman in Indiana played by Richard Dreyfuss, having dinner with his family. Roy, you may remember, has started showing some strange behavior after his experience of seeing a UFO, and unusual compulsions are starting to crop up. In the family dinner scene, Roy becomes oddly spellbound by the mashed potatoes and begins piling them on his plate and carving them into a weird shape. His family stares, puzzled and worried. Embarrassed and emotional, Roy tries to reassure his family that he is okay, that he is still "Dad," but he points significantly to the heaped-up mashed potatoes and confesses: "This means something. This is important." It is a pivotal scene in the film. As the story unfolds, Roy repeats his obsession with various other materials in ways that would be hilarious if they were not such obvious symptoms of worsening mental stress. The general shape of his constructions is always roughly the same, but Roy himself does not know exactly what it represents until . . . well, perhaps spoilers should be avoided, even for a 44-year-old movie. Suffice it to say that Roy is being driven by his overwhelming imagination of a *place*, a *real* place but one where he has never been.

1. The church is in the world (in society, in culture, in the environment, and so on).

First of all, the church is always and everywhere *embedded* and *entangled* in, never separate or insulated from, the world. I think this should go without saying, but perhaps it's best to say it anyway. I wonder if this obvious fact is rather controverted today, through such Christian proposals as Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in *Resident Aliens* by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon). But for better and for worse, the church cannot be segregated, isolated, or defended *from* the world; the church and the world interpenetrate each other. You could almost say (although it sounds a bit devilish to say it this way) that the church has *metastasized* through every aspect of the world and the culture. This has a negative aspect, certainly: the church in the world is as weak, human, foolish, faddish, stupid, venal, and just plain *broken* as the world at large. But we should not forget that there is also a positive side to the truth that the church is in the world: The church as a community enjoys the benefits—we call them “blessings” in church-speak!—of features of the society in which we live, such as peace, safety, prosperity, healthy environment, neighborliness, infrastructure, and so on. By the same token, problems such as poverty, disease, violence, corruption, insecurity, disappointment, instability . . . cannot be simply “externalized” by the church, because they are *church problems*, too! So are the large-scale pathologies of our contemporary culture: un- and under-employment, the disintegration of the family, generalized distrust of institutions, the erosion of social capital, globalization and the corollary destruction of local economies, racism, sexism, incivility, greed, addiction, climate change, and so on. All these things are not merely external to the church, as if they were somebody else's problems: we experience both the good and the bad of the world, because the church is truly *in* the world.

The fallen (and still falling!) condition of human culture is a pressing fact, both in society at large and also within the church. This is why the lines from William Butler Yeats's poem “The Second Coming” resonate so strongly with us:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.³*

It's hard to believe, but that poem is a hundred years old, for Yeats was writing in the wake of the First World War and at the beginning of the bloody war that would

lead to Irish independence. The idea that “things fall apart; the centre cannot hold” has become irresistibly contemporary, echoed repeatedly by the twentieth-century’s long crescendo of violent evil and etched into the geography of scars⁴ that is the map of the contemporary world. Not only in struggling places in Africa, but also in prosperous and developed societies like our own, very many people have the sense that the culture no longer functions as it should, and that something is deeply amiss with us and the world in which we live.

Increasingly, the church-in-the-world must realize that it has no reserved “sacred space” as a specially privileged institution in the culture; that the world around us will not automatically recognize and respect the role of the church in the world or urge people to pay attention to what we say. I’ve been thinking about this trend more recently, especially as I compare our circumstances in this country with what I see elsewhere in the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This trend in our context toward marginalization of the church is real, we should not *exaggerate* how “secular” our society has become or pretend that the culture/media/government is plainly hostile to Christianity. The “inevitable” slide toward secularism is a *myth*—just like the inevitable, triumphant *success* of the church-in-the-world is a myth. But myths aside, we can no longer pretend that the church occupies the leading place in our culture and our communities, or a privileged status to which we can claim entitlement. We experience feelings of dislocation and resentment, even in our own communities, like the old regular members who come into church and find strangers sitting where *they* are accustomed to sit; the secular world has taken “our” pew (and their children are coloring in the hymnal).⁵

As an aside, in the preceding, I used “church” in the singular a number of times, but that is a little misleading and requires some explanation or defense. When we are talking about the “church-in-the-world” we are really talking about a plural, diverse, sometimes even self-contradictory reality. The churches, plural, always have a hard time speaking with one voice about anything. So you shouldn’t imagine that the “church” is somehow a univocal, solid thing standing apart from the chaos, confusion, and disunity of “the world.” As much as we believe and hope for the *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica*, we must admit that the empirical church, the Christianity we experience day to day and study through history, was and remains “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.” And in the face of the empirical disunity of the churches, we must resist the temptation to settle for a merely sectarian creed and confess “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Missouri Synod.” We believe, according to the Scriptures, in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, just as there is one God and Father of all (Eph 4:5–6). But we should always remember that the *unity* of the church (like its *holiness*) is a matter of *faith*, not an observation based on impartial evidence.

Since the church (or churches, collectively) no longer leads or “governs” the

culture or the community, then the church is always operating on foreign soil; every game we play is an *away* game with no home-field advantage. This means that the church does not, cannot, dictate the conditions or circumstances in which it lives in the world. Strictly speaking, the church-in-the-world has no “right” to official recognition, privileged tax status, presumptive moral authority, or prestige based on long-established respectability. The church’s life and work in the world is not from a position of strength, but of *weakness*, and that weakness—rather than strength—extends to the church’s institutional, political, financial, cultural, and even moral existence. The characteristic, utterly normal weakness of the church is the first reason why it may be misleading to describe our work in the world as “mercy”: *mercy* is a benevolent attitude and gesture from the powerful to the powerless, a gracious withholding of proper punishment and exercise of sovereign privilege. That is a fine way to speak of what God does for us and for all in Christ, but it isn’t really accurate as a description of our place in the world. A better word for the latter is “service” because *service* clearly denotes a help that comes “from below.” For too long we have conceived of the church’s mission in the wrong terms because we *assumed the church was strong*: mission was from the rich to the poor, from the powerful to the powerless, from the civilized to the primitive, from the educated to the ignorant . . . in short, from the West to the rest. None of those assumptions is really true, and it’s time we got over such misunderstandings of our place in the world as the people of God.

The church-in-the-world is *weak* rather than strong, and this means that we should expect to see the church-as-institution *lose* (rather than win) leadership and power and prestige in relation to the way the culture works (politics, economics, media, education, public policy, and so on). Yet the church’s loss of leadership and power and prestige must not prompt us to retreat or withdraw. Of course, as we have said, real withdrawal is not actually possible because the church (whether we like it or not) is in the world; but the church can (and sometimes does) retreat from the world by refusing the terms (of weakness!) of its own life in the world, and by subtly changing its own story—from a cosmic salvific story of being caught up in God loving, reclaiming, redeeming, and renewing his whole creation, to a *smaller* story of a few survivors escaping from a sinking, doomed ship.

2. The church is responsible for the world.

Even though the churches, as the community of God’s people, are not in any sense “in charge of” or “master” of the cultural, the society, and so on, nevertheless we are entrusted with *responsibility* for the world around us. The communities where we live, the society of which we are members, the culture that we help make and that partly makes us who we are . . . all these have been placed into our care by the God who made us and put us in the world here and now. Mention was made above of Rod Dreher’s book *The Benedict Option* as an example of attempts to in some sense

“Resistance” signifies not a campaign of overwhelming conquest, but a determined holding action fought by a weaker force.

withdraw the church from the world, and that option may be contrasted with another recent effort to think about Christian responsibility for the world. *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*, by Alan Jacobs, considers a very different mode of engagement with the world. Jacobs examines how, at a dark but crucial point during World

War II, a number of Christian intellectuals tried to imagine, explain, and propose how Christianity could be of central importance in rebuilding civilization after the most destructive war in history. The thinkers Jacobs considers include T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, Jacques Maritain, Simone Weil, and numerous others. It’s a fascinating book, even though (as you may have noticed) post-war civilization has not been restored to the glory of Christendom. The engagement of mid-twentieth-century intellectuals in the enormous business of cultural renewal is not important because it was successful, but because it was attempted at all.

One shape of this responsibility and engagement is what Emmanuel Katongole calls “resistance.” This *resistance* stands in resolute opposition to the dehumanizing power of death and anarchy. Christians resist “mere anarchy” and the “passionate intensity” of the worst. It is of great importance that we remember that the meaning of our efforts does not depend on success. In Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, King Théoden of Rohan is confronted by the overwhelming odds against his army in the coming battle, as one of his men says, “We cannot defeat the armies of Mordor.” “No,” acknowledges Théoden, “we cannot. But we will meet them in battle nonetheless.” The film captures vividly the sense in which the king’s words are not defeatist but heroic, and they bolster the courage of his soldiers.

Even if our power is insufficient to defeat the church’s enemies of anarchy and evil, we neither surrender nor despair nor retreat nor escape, but we will go down fighting against everything that erodes, effaces, and perverts God’s creation, especially his human creatures. Katongole’s careful choice of the word “resistance” can adjust our imagination of the “church militant,” since “resistance” signifies not a campaign of overwhelming conquest, but a determined holding action fought by a weaker force. There is, of course, communion between the church militant and the church triumphant, between the visible “now” and the unseen “not yet,” but communion does not imply continuity, as if the resistance of the church militant must eventually result in final conquest and triumph. The image of resistance evokes something true about the church’s struggle against sin and the effects of sin, in the shadow of which the promise of resurrection is not confidence of ultimate success but hope in God’s great “nevertheless.”

Another way of expressing the church's responsibility for the world is *hope*: the church offers "hope" *despite* the evidence of the world! This is an important difference between "hope" and mere "optimism," which is the reasonable expectation that things are going pretty well and will probably turn out okay. But hope, anchored to the promises of God in Christ, may display a kind of recklessness even (or especially) in the teeth of the evidence. As the American poet Wendell Berry said it someplace: "Be *joyful*, though you have considered all the facts."

It is important for the church's life and witness to remember that hope and *ambiguity* belong together. There is, perhaps, a necessary tension between evidence and promise, as there is between sight and faith. We may be able occasionally to point to little in-breakings of the promised kingdom, such as the healings and other miracles in the ministry of Jesus; but the evidence from all of human experience remains very mixed. As in the parable of the field, weeds and grain grow up together. The weeds appear stronger and more prolific, so that the Lord's field may not even be recognizable as a "field" at all—until the harvest. We, in the here and now, are not yet at the harvest, nor do we have an external vantage point from which to watch the spectacle as it unfolds. We are God's field, surrounded and threatened by what the enemy has planted.

An inveterate do-it-yourselfer, I am not only a homebrewer, but also once tried planting my own field of barley. I turned out to be a poor farmer, for I had not prepared the soil properly. Weeds sprouted up almost immediately, and in a very few weeks these seemed to have taken over entirely. On a hot day in late summer, I stood beside the overgrown plot and mourned the complete disappearance of the barley, and realized it was my own fault. And then, to my surprise, I spotted a single ripe head of grain, about knee-high and almost obscured among the rank weeds. It was easy to miss. But once I had seen it, I noticed another one like it, and then another and another. I knelt down and snapped off a few of the heads: perfect double rows of plump brown grains. Before long I was on hands and knees, oblivious to the heat and the weeds and the bugs, and an hour later I had filled a paper bag with real, honest-to-goodness, home-grown barley.

It was not only satisfying to harvest the fruit of what had been planted; it also changed forever my imagination of the angels who, at the end of Christ's parable, are sent into the field to gather the harvest. Now in my mind they are crawling on hands and knees, sweating and swatting flies, as they painstakingly gather one almost-hidden head of grain after another, until nothing is lost or wasted or overlooked. The ambiguity of hope makes itself felt everywhere in the world in the mixed evidence of human experience; and yet among the choking and undeniable works of the devil are still to be glimpsed the fruitful grain growing toward God's harvest.

At this point I want to make a connection to a distinction that Emmanuel Katongole also uses: the distinction between "tactical" ways of working and thinking,

and “strategic” plans, goals, and actions. The difference between the two is often a matter of scale: strategies tend to be bigger and more comprehensive than tactics—but not always. Strategic thinking focuses on the ultimate goal, while tactical thinking is *penultimate* and depends on the shifting circumstances in which we find ourselves. The prevailing *ambiguity*, the mixed evidence of experience, all pushes us to realize that our Christian hope is anchored “strategically” to the promise of the resurrection, a new heaven and a new earth; and yet it is enacted “tactically”—taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves, *not* relying on *permanence* or stability or assuming a *grand strategic vision* of which we are more or less in control. When we say that hope works tactically, we mean that our speaking and acting out of that hope will be opportunistic and improvisational. Hope is a kind of “guerilla warfare.”⁷

The “tactical” (as distinct from “strategic”) character of the churches’ engagement in the world does not exclude all attempts to address larger “systemic” problems and evils. I think this is a common error of conservative Christians. In American

Our social engagement is always “tactical” in the sense of being partial, imperfect, and penultimate.

society, this error manifests itself when the church concerns itself only with problems on an individual scale, even when there are definite cultural or societal causes that could be considered. For example, we help individuals or individual families that are in economic need, but we are inclined to stay out of discussions of economic injustice. The church’s

“mercy” is doled out individually, even when a possible form of that mercy would be opposition to predatory corporate interests and the political policies that favor them above ordinary (i.e., *powerless*) people. On the other hand, American Christians on the progressive side of the political spectrum, since at least Walter Rauschenbusch and his “social gospel,” have perennially conflated social and political agendas with the kingdom itself. When the church (or churches) is engaged in systemic action, it must be remembered that such action is still tactical, penultimate, opportunistic—societal or political changes are never our grand strategic goal. That goal is the kingdom of God, which comes of itself, without our prayer, though we pray that it will come to us also. In the meanwhile, we live and work *tactically* as children of the kingdom, shaping the poor material we have to work with (sinful people like us and broken institutions) into *rough approximations* of the kingdom. So even our social engagement (yes, even “political” involvement or advocacy) is always “tactical” in the sense of being partial, imperfect, and penultimate.

Because we live with ambiguity, and our work for the kingdom of God is necessarily “tactical” rather than “strategic,” we need to cultivate and embrace

a posture of humility rather than arrogance. Humility is not the same thing as insecurity; it is not the opposite of confidence. On the contrary, Christians practice what missiologist David Bosch (another African, though a white one) called “bold humility,” and that boldness flows from the church’s inner life, to which we now turn.

3. The church’s inner life as a community of resistance and hope

The ambiguity of the evidence, the persistence of pain and sin and death, and the passionate intensity of mere anarchy all remind us that the church does not draw its life from its success in the world, but from its center, Jesus Christ. The church’s hope is rooted *in* and lives *from* the story of God’s salvation of the world in Jesus Christ: forgiving, healing, reconciling, restoring, re-creating, resurrecting.

One of the compelling facts about the church in today’s cultural climate has little to do with the style of our worship or architecture, or the beautiful logic of our doctrine, or the power of our institutions; but rather that Christian communities are figuring out together how to live out of a *different* and *better* story than all the other narratives on offer. Katongole put it this way: the church offers hope to “people who have lost not just hope for a meaningful existence, but even the power to locate their lives or activities within any historically meaningful narrative.”

The gospel is precisely that “historically meaningful narrative” which has the power to subvert false narratives (materialism, technological progress, sexual hedonism masquerading as freedom, etc.) and the power to resist the culture of death in all its forms. But remember that we are describing a *tactical* way of *resistance*, not a sure path to strategic victory, so we must remember that our telling of the Christian story—the gospel story of God’s victory through the death and resurrection of Christ—will *not* always be “victorious” or “successful” in the ways we usually understand those words. Indeed, the church’s story often (usually?) looks quite different.

The way that story works, the way *it means* things in the world, is that the church is constantly constructing *rough approximations* of the reality we have not yet seen with our eyes but that has been promised to us. Those rough approximations of justice, of care, of *shalom*, of reclamation and redemption and renewal—of *re-creation*—are constantly being attempted at every scale from personal stories to families to congregations to cities to nations. We roughly approximate the city of God in which righteousness dwells with whatever lousy, meager, totally inadequate materials (and people) we have handy. The results are, alas, marked by weakness, failure, repentance, and tears; yet running through it is healing and grace. The church’s inner life as a community of resistance and hope relies not on a science of perfect knowledge, but on the practice of a perpetual art that loves its subject. In the words of Wendell Berry, “An art that heals and protects its subject is a geography of scars.”⁸ Resistance (in Katongole’s meaning) and hope are the tools of the art by which we work at healing and protecting the world.

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And this brings us back to the *Close Encounters* scene described at the beginning of this essay. Roy Neary scared his kids and his wife by sculpting the Devil's Tower in Wyoming (oops! that *was* a spoiler) out of mashed potatoes. In the mess on Roy's plate, the shape of something is "kinda-sorta" there but it's not a very good likeness, and it's driving Roy a bit crazy because he knows somehow what it *ought* to look like, and where he has to go. "This means something,

this is important," he says with desperate certainty. Our rough approximations of the kingdom of God are persistently only as successful as Roy's mashed-potato sculpture. The shape is "kinda-sorta" right but not recognizable to anybody else; the materials (and the people) being employed are grossly, even laughably, inadequate to the task. But we do not quit. We keep sculpting little models of the city of God, and we hope people around us get a glimpse—as we ourselves want and need a glimpse—of the kingdom. Here we cobble together a little island of reconciliation in a sea of callous violence; there we carve out a comfort and peace in a storm of pain and suffering; at a graveside we hear and speak defiant, hopeful promises of resurrection for all to cling to like life preservers after a shipwreck. We wrestle, and push, and pile up, and carve out and move around, we plant and we uproot, and we try and try again, and in the end we know the result is not very good but we point and say anyway: "This means something! This is important!"

Endnotes

- 1 What follows is an essay, rather than an academic article. It is less the result of detailed scholarly research than an exercise in theological reflection guided, in part, by thinkers from whom I am learning.
- 2 See especially his essay, "Postmodern Illusions and the Challenges of African Theology: The Ecclesial Tactics of Resistance," in *Modern Theology* 16 no. 2 (April 2000): 237–254. I am indebted to Katongole and others, but he is, of course, in no way responsible for any of my use or extension of his ideas.
- 3 Available online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>.
- 4 I am borrowing the phrase "geography of scars" from Wendell Berry.
- 5 An exception to this might be African American communities, where the churches—in spite of everything!—enjoy a good deal more respect than almost any other institution.
- 6 To point to one example of such triumphant imagery, consider this line of the hymn "Lift High the Cross": "The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine."
- 7 But we need to be careful about our military metaphors. The militancy of the gospel of hope is "warfare" against sin, death, destruction, and violence. Martial metaphors may need to be deployed sparingly and not left unexplained in our age of religiously motivated suicide bombers.
- 8 Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 7.

What Can the West Learn from the Rest? Nurturing the Culture of Global Conversation

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Religious studies scholars and historians have been discussing the shift of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South since the 1950s. According to these scholars, this phenomenon has its own implications for the development of Christian theology and global Christian practices. Andrew Walls, for example, indicated twenty-five years ago that, because of the shift of Christianity to this part of the world, “Third World theology is [more] likely to be the representative Christian theology.”¹ In addition, in 2002, he

further argued, “the signs suggest that what Christianity of the twenty-first century will be like, in its theology, its worship, its effect on society, its penetration of new areas, whether geographically or culturally, will depend on what happens in Africa, in Latin America, and in some parts of Asia.”²

This article addresses the following questions: How are we to understand this new phenomenon and its implication for how we understand the Lutheran faith, practices, and tradition? Most importantly, how can Lutheran scholars from both sides of the global community (North and South) effectively nurture the culture of global conversation, “striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27)?

The Shift of Christianity to the Global South and African Lutheranism

The demography of global Christianity has changed quite dramatically over the last few decades, but few Lutherans in the Global North, particularly in North America, are aware of that. In the last two decades, as Lutherans in North America have experienced slow decline in numbers, Lutheran churches in the Global South have continued to grow in large numbers. At present, the Lutheran churches in Africa are one of the fastest growing churches in the world. There are twenty-nine Lutheran bodies in Africa; and the Lutheran church in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), is the largest Lutheran church in the world, with over ten million active communicant members.³ There are more Lutheran members in Ethiopia than in all the Lutheran churches in America combined; and the total number of Lutherans in Africa exceeds those in Germany, which is still the country with the largest Lutheran population.⁴

In Asia, forty-seven Lutheran churches are also growing in number. The largest of these is the Lutheran church in Indonesia, the Protestant Christian Barak Church (HKBP), which has over four million members. According to the membership data of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), there are close to six million Lutherans in Indonesia, which means that there are more Lutherans in Indonesia than there are members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) combined.⁵ How will these churches shape traditional Lutheranism as they continue to confess the Lutheran faith in the non-western culture?

If we look at the LWF membership, in 1988, the member churches had a combined membership of 54.9 million. Of these, 18 percent lived in Africa, Asia, and South America. Now, the LWF has registered seventy-seven million members, of which 22 percent live in Africa, 9 percent in Asia, and 6 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Altogether, 37 percent of Lutherans live in the Global South. Between 1988 and 2020, the Lutherans in Europe and North America declined in real numbers. By contrast, the number of Lutherans in the Global South more than tripled, going from 8.54 million in 1988 to forty million in 2020, gaining over a million members each year.⁶

What does this shift of Christianity imply? As stated earlier, according to some scholars, the demographic shift of Christianity to the Global South will be accompanied by fresh theological reflection. In other words, this phenomenon creates an opportunity for southern Christians to shape or frame the future of Christianity. This could mean that the Lutheran churches in Africa and Asia will take the lead in shaping the future of Lutheranism. The question is, however, whether this will ever happen. Let us just assume that this is a possibility. If so, what is this new form of Lutheranism going to be like?

One possibility is that since the African culture and tradition resemble those

of biblical times more closely than Western culture and tradition, this might create an opportunity for African Lutheran leaders and scholars to lead the global Lutheran community towards new and more biblical ways of being a church. According to Philip Jenkins, the vast majority of non-western Christians are more biblical than are western Christians.⁷ He states that they

follow a literalist understanding (translation) of the Bible. This is in contrast with northern Christianity, which in his account is liberal in theology (e.g., advocating for the ordination of women), and liberal in morality (e.g., accepting homosexuality, normalizing divorce, and advocating for abortion and the use of contraception). According to Jenkins, what helped churches in the Global South to grow in numbers is their conservative approach to Christianity. He argues that “churches that are doing best in the world as a whole are the ones that stand furthest from western liberal orthodoxies.”⁸

Related to African Christians’ emphasis on the Bible, one can also observe that they make abundant use of the prophetic books of both the Old and New Testament. This is mainly because “the great majority of southern Christians (and increasingly, of all Christians) really are the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, and even the dehumanized.”⁹ As Christians experiencing poverty and social, economic, and political oppression in its different forms, they find values in the prophetic books of the Bible that are mostly absent from the theological reflection of twenty-first-century western Christianity. According to Andrew Walls, at times this has led to circumstances wherein African scholars were “forced to work out some sort of Christian response to situations where western theology [provided] no answer because it has no questions or any relevant experience.”¹⁰ Therefore, the other possibility is that African Lutherans might take the lead in framing the future discussion about theological approaches to economic, political, social, and ecological justice.

Third, Christians in the South formulate contextual theology in diverse communities, whereas the Christian tradition in the north was largely shaped by the political and ecclesiastical structure of Christendom. Asian Christians, for example, reflect on what it means to be a minority religion in a pluralistic context, whereas Africans are more concerned about the compatibility of Christian faith with pre-Christian religious and cultural traditions.¹¹ In this new age, when globalization and migration have brought our world together, southern Lutherans could also take the lead in framing the discussion or theological conversation concerning how to do

African Lutherans might take the lead in framing the future discussion about theological approaches to economic, political, social, and ecological justice.

missions among diverse religious and cultural communities, or how to equip leaders with the ability to engage in cross-cultural ministries.

Finally, many congregations in North America find themselves lost in the chaos of broken communities. This new world has confounded many in their dearly held assumptions, and they do not know how to find order or identity in the midst of the chaos. The chaos has forced them to abandon their controlling structures and superficial identities, and to dig deep within themselves to find out the purpose and identity that really binds the church together. The growing churches in the Global South offer many helpful suggestions for how to dance between order and disorder as well as how to see chaos and change as allies rather than as enemies.

Can the West Learn from the Rest?

With the center of gravity of global Christianity shifting to the South, a number of leaders and scholars expect to see the rise of new voices and fresh theological reflections from the non-western world.¹² They also expect to see southern Christians assuming leadership in international organizations such as LWF and others.¹³ The reality, however, is that even though the number of Christians in the North has been declining for decades, northern churches' influence on others has continued. Theological institutions in the Global South are still for the most part dependent on northern scholarship. When it comes to global leadership, leadership in world institutions such as the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Evangelical Alliance, The International Lutheran Council and so on are still predominantly under the leadership of people from the North.

However, this dominant tradition seems to have been changing slowly in the last few decades. The decline in membership has begun to be reflected in a gradual decline of the leadership by northern churches at the global scale.¹⁴ Among the Pentecostals, for example, most revival movements in the twentieth century were led by whites, whereas in the twenty-first century, these movements are taken over by non-whites from the South. With the flow of large numbers of immigrants to Europe and North America, leaders of these revival movements are also having a larger influence in the Western world. Often, churches that are growing in the West are led by these immigrants.

The global influence of southern Christians is witnessed in what Jenkins refers to as "reverse missions," that is, mission from the Majority World back to the West.

Taking as his example an African church in Amsterdam, he argues that this "one congregation probably represents, in miniature, the future face of Christianity in Western Europe." He further argues that

Are western scholars ready to listen, engage, and learn from others?

“for the next few decades, the face of religious practices across the face of Europe should be painted in brown or black.”¹⁵ Jenkins’s argument is supported by some scholars who discussed the role of diaspora peoples in evangelism to the West.¹⁶ The publication of a volume by Sierra Leone-born theologian and professor of world history at Emory University, Jehu Hanciles, entitled *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West*, is one good example.¹⁷ In this work, Hanciles states that every African Christian considers every place of residence a mission field, both in Africa and throughout the world.¹⁸

Furthermore, when we look at the past few decades, there has been new and emerging Christian scholarship in the South, by both Lutherans and non-Lutherans.¹⁹ These newly emerging voices and theological expressions arise as leaders and theologians in the South continually attempt to respond to critical issues in their context. The fundamental question, however, is whether the global Lutheran community is engaging, critiquing, and investigating these theologies in light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions so that they can find their place in the global Lutheran landscape. Another related question is whether there is a place for these emerging southern voices in the dominant culture of western scholarship. Are western scholars ready to listen, engage, and learn from others?

As Jenkins observed, the northern scholars and church leaders are not ready to learn or engage others because they are not taking the rise of Christianity in the Global South into serious account. They have not only overlooked or given little value to this new phenomenon, but they have also continued with their description of Christianity as a Western religion.²⁰ According to Jenkins, western Christians “rarely give the South anything like the attention it deserves, but when they do notice it, they tend to project on it their own familiar realities and desires.”²¹ He further argues that “time and again, when European and American Christians look South, they see what they want to see.”²²

As described above, a few western scholars like Jenkins, Walls, and others have tried to introduce their own conception of a global history of Christianity into these debates. A number of western Christian scholars, however, still follow a Eurocentric reading and interpretation of Christian history—a Christian history which appears to begin and end with western Christianity. For many decades, they have generally been treating Christianity in other parts of the world as an appendix to the history of European Christianity.²³ The Christian faith that existed outside the Western hemisphere is being generally understood and described as what has been brought there by missionaries. However, this Eurocentric reading of Christian history neglects the fact that Christianity existed in Africa beginning early in the patristic period (perhaps even before then in the cases of Ethiopia and Egypt), and that Christianity existed in Asia before the arrival of western missionaries. After Christianity began in the Near East, Christianity was mainly spread throughout North Africa and

Asia. In the first and second centuries, the area comprising Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Mesopotamia was considered the center of Christianity. Tunisia was home to the great church fathers such as Cyprian, Tertullian, and Augustine—the three main theologians who laid the foundation for western theology to emerge as it did. Already by the second century, Egypt and North Africa were also part of the Christian Roman Empire, playing a major role in the formation of global Christian theology. Quoting Walls,

[African] Christianity was established not only before the white people came, but before Islam came; Christianity has [existed] continuously in Africa for far longer than it has in Scotland, and infinitely longer than it has in the United States. African Christianity today can assert their right to the whole history of Christianity in Africa, stretching back almost to the apostolic age.²⁵

On the other hand, according to Fans Wijzen, the other main reason why western Christians may not learn much from the rest of the world is because they “cannot simply return to pre-modern values.”²⁶ He argues that the Christian ideas entertained by scholars and church leaders in the Global South are “pre-modern, pre-enlightenment values,” which contradict the Western modern and postmodern worldviews.²⁷ Therefore, according to Wijzen, the only way the West can learn from the rest is if the two are able to adopt a new hermeneutical principle, which he refers to as a “trans-modern hermeneutic,” a method which he believes can help the southern Christians transcend “the pre-modern values.”²⁸ This is in reaction to Jenkins’s argument that “Christians [in the Global South] are far more conservative in terms of both belief and moral teaching.”²⁹

Besides southern churches being conservative, for Wijzen, what constitutes pre-modern or pre-enlightenment values in the Christianity of the Global South is its emphasis on supernatural experience. As Jenkins also described it, Christianity in the Global South is mostly “traditional, orthodox, and supernatural.”³⁰ According to him, all Christians, regardless of their denomination, favor prophecy, faith-healing, exorcism, and dream-visions.³¹ For Christians in the South, such practices are part of their everyday reality. They believe in the objective existence of evil spirits and the necessity for Christians to free people from the works and domination of those spirits. Gospel texts that talk about Jesus healing the sick, casting out demons, and performing other signs and wonders are central to their ministry, even though such passages are seen by many northern churches as marginal, symbolic, and purely historical in nature.

For some western scholars, southern Christianity is a creation of western missionaries, and therefore there is nothing new to learn from them. In other words, there is not much to learn from southern Christianity since it is a duplicate of western

Christianity. This assumption is founded on western scholars' emphasis on the role of missionaries in the spread of Christianity in the Global South.³² In recent scholarship, however, in response to such erroneous conclusions, some have started to emphasize the role of indigenous missionaries in the spread and development of Christianity in the South. Sundkler and Steed, for example, argue that it was indigenous missionaries who could not "keep the discovery for individual consumption but took the message to others [so that] the message could spread as rings on the water."³³ Walls also rightly states, "All the great movements towards the Christian faith in Africa have been African led."³⁴

The question remains, however, if the indigenous missionaries played a major role in the growth of Christianity in the Global South, what then was the contribution of the northern missionaries? According to Lamin Sanneh, the Christian tradition in the South should be described as an indigenous response rather than as an extension of churches from the Western world.³⁵ The work of missionaries that contributed greatly to the growth of Christianity was the priority they placed on translating the Bible into local languages, which according to Sanneh has resulted in the development of literacy in each culture and in the empowerment of endogenous leaders. According to Sanneh, "Christian missions are better seen as a translation movement, with consequences for vernacular revitalization, religious change, and social transformation, than as a vehicle for Western cultural domination."³⁶

Similarly, Jenkins also argues that the Christian churches in the South are "not just a transplanted version of the familiar religion of the older Christian status [quo]: the new Christendom is no mirror image of the Old. It is a truly new and developing entity."³⁷ He argues that the southern churches have developed a distinct form of Christianity "strictly on their own terms."³⁸ For him, Christian faith in the South is a new expression of faith distinctly being formed and developed. Again, what is not answered clearly in Jenkins's writings is what this new form of Christianity looks like. How is this new form "strictly" African, Asian, or Latin American? And what does this mean for the Lutheran churches in the South?

Coming back to the question of whether the West is ready to learn from others, one needs to discern what the relationship will be like for the future between churches in the South and North. Will the shift of Christianity to the South awaken the

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western Christians and gravitate them towards mutual dialogue and partnerships in mission, or will the West remain isolated and continue with its previous tradition? Or, as Jenkins predicted based on Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, will this demographic shift result in a clash between Christians in the North and South?³⁹ According to Jenkins, the awakening among Christians in the South may eventually lead to revolt against any form of domination by the North. This of course was also discussed over half a century ago by Hendrik Kraemer and Max Warren.⁴⁰

Rather than predicting the possibility of conflict, how about if we work together for global conversation and openness to forming partnerships for making a greater impact in our world today? Christians in the Global South are globally engaged. For example, Brazil, Korea, and Nigeria are sending out large numbers of missionaries globally. The Lutheran churches in Africa have been doing the same for the last few decades. The sentiment that mission work flows from the West to the rest has changed. With this change happening, what are the western churches to do? In fact, according to Robert Wuthnow, in *Boundless Faith: Global Outreach of American Churches*, many American churches forged partnerships with the South and are "engaging in faster and more efficient transcultural communication, interacting with a sizable population of refugees and immigrants, and contributing to large-scale international humanitarian and relief organizations."⁴¹

Nurturing the Culture of Global Conversation

In addition to the demographic shift discussed above, because of globalization, our world today is connected more than ever. Media and migration have changed the face of our world. With these changes, God seems to have provided churches with the opportunity to move beyond their comfort zones and limited territories to impact the world in ways that they have never done before. So why not embrace this opportunity? The church in the twenty-first century has a great opportunity if it can recognize its opportunity and responsibility to stand with its partners and to face the challenges of this postmodern time. I argue that Lutheran churches in particular should opt to do mission in partnership openly with global partners. Some probably assume that such openness will lead to a theological compromise on their side. However, it is only where openness takes precedence that true dialogue and mutual learning occur. This stance could also help all churches involved, particularly confessional Lutheran churches, to assist their partners in coming to what the confessional Lutheran churches consider to be the right understanding of the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. Such dialogue and mutual learning will be of particular benefit not only to western churches but to the growing Lutheran churches in Africa and Asia.

Is there anything that western churches can learn from southern churches if such mutual dialogue and mission partnerships occur? The most important lesson that

the western Christians can learn from Christians in the Global South is their emphasis on local and global mission, which is the proclamation of the gospel by all Christians to all people. This proclamation is in response to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18–20). What I have come

to understand after living in America for the last ten years, and visiting European countries nine years ago, is that the sense of the proclamation of the gospel is not strong among western Christians. African Lutherans are committed to engaging their community with the gospel. Women in particular play a major role in creating social networks and small prayer and Bible study groups through which they witness to Christ to the people in their communities.

Western Lutheran churches could also learn from southern Lutherans how to address the wholeness of life in their theology and ministry. In the West, theology shaped by secularism has mostly been a state of mind that failed to address the whole of life as we see it in the Gospels.⁴² Christians in the Global South, on the other hand, are notoriously religious people who do not distinguish between the sacred and the profane because they view life as a whole. They put faith at the center of their religious, social, economic, and political lives. As John Mbiti emphasized, “Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. *Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.*”⁴³ Therefore, in the Global South, religion is part of all kinds of academic and non-academic discourse, which is different from the western form of Christianity that creates clear boundaries between the spiritual and the material. For example, most Lutheran churches in the South have been involved in the struggle against poverty and the lack of democracy. They have also been playing an important role in addressing climate change and global epidemics such as HIV/AIDS. For them, God’s mission is holistic. The gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to address both the spiritual and physical lives of the community.

One other strength of the Lutheran churches in the Global South is their emphasis on lay ministry. Because they are good at utilizing the gift of the laity respectfully, they are able to reach multitudes and grow in large numbers. Men and women, lay and ordained, youth and children, are all given the opportunity to serve and be a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities.⁴⁴ The Christian church in the South is not only growing in number; it is also sending its missionaries, both men and women, to different parts of the world and planting the largest churches.

It is only where openness takes precedence that true dialogue and mutual learning occur.

Conclusion

Given the striking shift that is happening globally, it is time for the global Christian community to respond together thoughtfully. Christians need to think together about how these geographic changes will impact Christian ministry and theology. For this to happen, the western academy needs to start to think more globally. Leaders of the Christian community, particularly American Lutherans, also need to reflect on how they might engage Lutherans in the Global South in a responsive missionary work in this new global age.

Endnotes

- 1 Andrew Walls, "The Transmission of Christian Faith: A Reflection" in *World Christianity*, ed. Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymod, (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 10. For more details on the shift of Christianity to the Global South, see Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 24, no. 2 (April 2000): 50–58; Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2009); and Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).
- 2 Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 32.
3. Of these 29 churches, 23 are members of the LWF. For details, see Arland Jacobson and James Aageson, ed., *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008). See also <https://www.lutheranworld.org/country/germany>, accessed 8/13/21.
- 4 Note that there exist more than eleven Lutheran churches in Germany, and only eleven of them are registered as members of the LWF. See <https://www.lutheranworld.org/country/germany>, accessed 3/7/20.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 For more detail, see Jan Pranger, "Lutherans in the World Church: An Overview" in *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 1–7, 17.
- 7 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 8. Jenkins's book was named one of the top religious books of 2002 by *USA Today*.
- 8 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 14.
- 9 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 216.
- 10 Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 46.

- 11 See John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); Emmanuel Katongole, ed., *African Theology Today* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2002); Bénédet Bujo and Juvénal Ilunga Muya, *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*, vol. 1 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003); Bénédet Bujo and Juvénal Ilunga Muya, *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers*, vol. 2 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006). For Asian Christian theology, see Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014) and Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Inculturation and Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).
- 12 Andrew Wall for example argued that the “future general reader of Church history is more likely to be concerned with Latin American and African, and perhaps some Asian, theology” than that of the European and/or American. See Andrew Walls, “The Transmission of Christian Faith,” 10. See also the discussion on this topic in Dyron B. Daughrity, *To Whom Does Christianity Belong? Critical Issues in World Christianity*. Understanding World Christianity Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 32–33.
- 13 For the discussion on the rise of Christianity in the Global South and its implication for the future of global leadership and theological reflection, see Elijah Kim, *The Rise of the Global South: The Decline of the Western Christendom and the Rise of Majority World Christianity* (Origen: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 4–7. See also the introduction of Dyron B. Daughrity, *To Whom Does Christianity Belong?*
- 14 Elijah Kim, *The Rise of the Global South*, 4.
- 15 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 114.
- 16 See Enoch Wan and Sadiri Joy Tira, “Diaspora Missiology and Missions in the Context of the Twenty-First Century,” in *Human Tidal Wave: Global Migration, Megacities, Multiculturalism, Diaspora Missiology* (Manila: LifeChange, 2013); Jervis David Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012); Stan Downes, “Mission by and beyond the Diaspora: Partnering with Diaspora Believers to Reach Other Immigrants and the Local People,” in *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015); Cody C. Lorange, “Case Study 4: Reflections of a Church Planter among Diaspora Groups in Metro-Chicago: Pursuing Cruciformity in Diaspora Missions,” in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011).
- 17 Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).
- 18 Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 390.
- 19 Five such examples are theologies of suffering and hope, theologies of work, theologies of the environment, theologies of the child and childhood, and public theologies. See an analysis of these theologies in Las G. Newman, “Theology in the Move: Discerning Global Shifts in Theological Thinking in the Global South,” in *Canadian-American Theological Review*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2016).
- 20 This includes Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); The few exceptional works include Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009).
- 21 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 86.
- 22 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 209.
- 23 A book by Robert Wuthnow for example, *Christianity in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) has nothing on Christianity in the Global South. Philip Jenkins refers to such an approach to Christianity as the “lost history of Christianity,” where he argues that when western Christians turn and move their “focus away from Europe,” everything they thought they “knew about Christianity shifts kaleidoscopically, even alarmingly.” See Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). For a brief discussion on western Christians’ approach to global Christian history, see Douglas Rutt, “Martin Luther’s Platzregen in Action: The Challenging Face of Global Christianity,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2014).

- 24 According to some scholars, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in the Book of Acts introduced Christianity to Ethiopia in the first century. A commonly accepted version of Christianity's establishment in Ethiopia, however, follows the account of the Syrian church historian Rufinus (AD 345–410), who narrated the official history of Christianity in Ethiopia beginning with the conversion of the Ethiopian king Ezana in the fourth century. See Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Printers, 1972), 98; Fekadu Gurrnessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origins and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, trans. and ed. Ezeikel Gebissa (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 26–28.
- 25 Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 91.
- 26 Fans Wijzen, “Global Christianity: A European Perspective” in *Exchange*, 39 (2009): 150.
- 27 Wijzen, “Global Christianity,” 150–151.
- 28 Wijzen, “Global Christianity,” 151.
- 29 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 7.
- 30 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 8.
- 31 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 8.
- 32 For more discussion on this, read Walls, “Africa in Christian History” in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 85–115. See also Fans Wijzen, “Global Christianity: A European Perspective.”
- 33 Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 470, 88–89.
- 34 Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 45.
- 35 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989). The book was expanded in 2009. See also Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 22.
- 36 Lamin Sanneh, “Christian Mission and the Pluralist Milieu: The African Experience,” *Missiology: An International Review* 12, no. 4 (October 1984): 334.
- 37 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 214.
- 38 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 6–7.
- 39 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). It should be noted that Jenkins also disagrees with Huntington on some issues.
- 40 Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 1–30; Max Warren, “General Introduction,” in *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion*, Christian Presence Series, ed. J. Tayler (London: SCM Press, 1963), 6.
- 41 Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: Global Outreach of American Churches* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 1–2.
- 42 Alister McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 128.
- 43 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 1.
- 44 See Musimbi Kanyoro, “The Future of the Lutheran Churches in Africa,” *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 33ff.

Reflections on Daniel Aleshire's *Beyond Profession The Next Future of Theological Education*

Dale A. Meyer



Dale A. Meyer is president emeritus and professor emeritus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. One of Meyer's most recent written contributions to the seminary is the 2021 Advent Sermon Series, "The Bible, Our

Book of Advents." Meyer has been speaking and preaching for more than 40 years. His areas of interest and study include 1 Peter, the church in a changing culture, and the Sabbath applied to life today.

During my fifteen years as president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, I cannot remember being asked how Concordia Seminary compares to other seminaries in the United States, not by a layperson, not by a pastor, and not by a church official. In one way that is to be expected; we all have more immediate tasks that fill our thoughts and conversations. Furthermore, looking outside our ecclesial family is not our habit, both for historical

reasons and for fellowship concerns. What I often did hear was what our seminaries should be doing but are not, talk at district and national conventions that was well-intended but not always informed, and frequent statements that our shrinking church needs to reshape the institutional preparation of pastors. Our seminaries do belong to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are administered on behalf of Synod's members by the two boards of regents and administrations, and therefore informal and formal talk, planning, funding, and ultimately convention actions are about governance. While the status of other seminaries in the United States is not normative for how we steward our seminaries, knowing the wider context of theological education in North America is instructive for governance that wisely stewards these institutions bequeathed to us by our Lord through our forebears. Daniel Aleshire knows that context as well as anyone, certainly more than anyone in the LCMS.

A graduate of Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Daniel Aleshire went on

to earn a PhD in psychology, serve as a professor at his alma mater, and work for the Search Institute in Minneapolis, a research organization with Lutheran connections. He is best known for his decades-long work with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which has some 280 member institutions and provides resources to help seminaries, especially senior administrators, in their individual contexts. He shared insights about us in “Meeting Missouri: Observations from An Outsider,” an essay published in 2020 by Concordia Seminary Press.

Because The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod embodies characteristics associated with both mainline and Evangelical Protestants, but does not fit with either group, it is a bit unto itself. While the Synod is certainly part of the broad family of Lutherans, bears some similarities to other Protestant church bodies, and formally relates to a few confessionally conservative Lutheran bodies in North America, it is unique among American denominations. *Sui generis* is not an offensive category to followers of Christ.¹

That uniqueness is obviously reflected in our seminaries. When our administrators attend ATS events, we are not totally “at home” with Protestant or Evangelical seminary groupings, and sometimes identify with issues of Roman Catholic seminaries. Couple Dr. Aleshire’s essay about us with his new book, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*, and you will find, perhaps surprisingly, that in the wider context of American theological schools today, our two seminaries are in excellent condition.

In his first chapter, Dr. Aleshire shares his own career history, a history lived amidst profound changes that older LCMS pastors remember as well. “I have witnessed a settled system become stressed in almost every way that it was settled when I entered seminary in 1969” (28). Unsettled times are not unique to denominational life or seminaries but are symptomatic of our entire society.² He identifies three influences of broader American life that have and will continue to impact theological education: cultural, religious, and higher education. “Very different kinds of schools, emerging at different times in American history, reflect these variables of influence,” which includes the Missouri Synod, *sui generis* though we may be (30).

Chapter two surveys the history of Protestant, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and historically black and racial/ethnic theological schools and their faith communities. After World War II,

Protestant seminaries shared in this fortuitous time. Enrollments increased, new buildings were erected, scholarship advanced, and the structures that had been built served this time well . . .

Mainline Protestants had become distinguishable from evangelical Protestants, and the mainline was dominant.” (38)

Some of us can remember those optimistic years, but “things began to change. Membership plateaued in the 1960s and began to decline” (38). President Lawrence Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary has documented that the LCMS grew in every year since its founding until 1970 when decline began that continues today.”³ Aleshire continues,

The dominance of the mainline made it possible to assume at first that the decline was an interruption, but the following decades undercut that assumption. Over the course of the final third of the century, denominational structures weakened and membership in many but not all congregations declined. (38)

You know the LCMS has not been immune to that decline, and it has caused many feelings among us, most especially grief at what has been lost. Aleshire: “Initially mainline Protestant seminaries were able to resist the effects of this numerical decline. They found revenue sources in gifts from individual donors, increased tuition, and endowments that, even with market fluctuations, increased in value” (38–39). That is true for our schools as well. Though slow to recognize the trend in real time, hindsight shows the clear decline. Donations from individuals and congregations did fill the gap. Seminaries began to build endowments, although (39) sometimes discouraged in so doing by people who assumed subsidy from the synodical budget would continue to meet most of the schools’ revenue needs. Tuitions were increased, in no small part because of costly developments in higher education, such as the rise of digital technology and increased government regulations that caused schools to add staff.

Aleshire’s next point is very important. “Schools that had served only students from one denomination sustained their enrollment by welcoming students of many denominations.” Today I know of seminaries with students from over a hundred denominations, but our two seminaries have only LCMS students preparing for ministry. Yes, our graduate schools admit any qualified person from any denomination who desires our biblical and confessional education. In this we are “Lutheran leaven” to the Christian world, but the pastors we form come from and go to congregations and institutions of the LCMS. “The fundamental shifts afoot in the denominations and congregations, as well as the social location of mainline Protestants in the culture, began to affect the seminaries” (38–39). Our seminaries were affected too but compared to many seminaries, our singular focus on providing candidates only for LCMS congregations has helped St. Louis and Fort Wayne weather storms that have diluted the mission of other theological schools. The vocation of our seminaries is crystal clear, and the bond between the people and

pastors of the LCMS with their seminaries, and more narrowly pastors with their alma mater, has us well situated to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges.

Mainline denominations began the twenty-first century with a very different future than the one with which they began the twentieth century. The privilege, financial capacity, and numeric strength that mainline Protestants enjoyed had dissipated. It is not clear why this happened, but the mighty mainline had been minimized, and that reality is a major influence on the seminaries related to these denominations. (39)

Aleshire concludes his summary of Protestant seminaries, the grouping in which our seminaries find the most but not all affinities. "Many mainline seminaries have the financial and institutional resources, the balance of educational capacity and imagination, and the administrative ability not only to do well but also to provide leadership to the religious communities they serve" (40). That's where your two schools are. I'm biased, of course, but the fiscal soundness, mission focus, and cultural uniqueness of our two schools can be substantiated by the numerous reports we submit. The ATS is not only a resource, but also one of our accrediting agencies, the other is the Higher Learning Commission. Following emphases from the federal Department of Education, both accrediting agencies have pushed member schools to quantifiable assessment of learning outcomes, meaning that candidates for the ministry have demonstrably learned what our curricula purport to teach. Further, both seminaries are accountable to over twenty entities of federal, state, and local governments, to the financial institutions that hold and service our funds, to our donors, and to the Synod in convention. Annual meetings of our faculties with Synod's Council of Presidents and innumerable conversations between seminary administrators and faculty members with individual district presidents throughout the year keep the focus upon providing able pastors for our congregations. To be sure, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12), and heeding other schools puts us on alert. Aleshire:

Others, especially schools that are distant from population centers, or that have overspent their endowments or never accrued one, or that have been ineffective in establishing a constituency of individual donors, will not do well in this century. At a time when a great deal of innovation is needed, many have little risk capital, and at a time when schools need maximum freedom to find their way to the future, they are operating with limited freedom. This century will likely result in many more institutional changes (40).⁴

History and its challenges provide the necessary prelude to Aleshire's proposal

for the future of ministerial education in the United States. The title *Beyond Profession* reaches back into the earliest times of ministerial training in America when clergy in colonial America were educated alongside future leaders of society. For example, Yale University began in 1701 when “a charter was granted for a school ‘wherein Youth may be instructed in the Arts and Sciences (and) through the blessing of Almighty God may be fitted for Publick (sic) employment both in Church and Civil State’” (32).⁵ That model integrated future clergy with laity in common learning, a way similar to what some in the LCMS have advocated for our time by relocating our seminaries onto the campus of a Concordia University System school. Well-rounded pastors should always be our goal but there are several problems with that suggestion, one being the partial loss of seminary governance into the broader governance of the university. The colonial arrangement of lay and clergy trained together changed in the nineteenth century. Those universities established divinity schools embedded within the university and, more common, free-standing seminaries were established. In 1800 there were only two free-standing seminaries in the United States; by 1900 there were over fifty. Our two LCMS seminaries, classified as denominational but free-standing, were established in that time as well. This nineteenth-century segregation of clergy candidates from the laity had several consequences, but pertinent here is theological specialization.

The homogeneity of faculty and students in denominational schools provided contexts in which students were socialized to particular kinds of ministry in particularized denominational structures. For all the competition among denominations, however, Protestants shared an important cultural privilege in the form of a quasi-established religion. (35)

And ministry became a profession, much like medicine and law, and seminaries became religious versions of medical schools and law schools.

The institutional and scholarly architecture that schools invented in the nineteenth century grew to maturity as professional education. . . . Ministry education could be understood fully as a form of professional education. The professional model was right for the times. It provided the education needed for ministers to assume their role among other professionals who functioned in an ever more complicated and sophisticated society. It fit the increasingly sophisticated demands of ministry, the increasingly bureaucratic structures of denominations, and the cultural status of the church. (36)

That was the education that Daniel Aleshire received when he entered Southern Baptist Seminary in 1969 and I and my classmates received when we entered Concordia Seminary the same year. But as we know, things have changed, and the curricula of your two seminaries have adjusted.

Chapter three begins with full quotation of two texts about pastoral attributes, Titus 1:7–9 and 1 Timothy 3:2–7. Reviewing the church’s loss of privilege in society, the rise of “nones,” and the history of theological education changing “by accretion rather than replacement” (78), Aleshire concludes,

I think the current cultural moment calls for renewed attention to the enduring qualities enumerated in the above Scriptures. . . . As religion is increasingly on the defensive and many religious institutions are in decline, an invaluable response will be to ensure the fundamental Christian character of Christian leaders. That emphasis on character will require the next theological education to assume more responsibility for cultivating these qualities in ministerial candidates. This effort will change parts of the curriculum and some of the strategies related to teaching and learning. (79)

Aleshire is not alone in his diagnosis. In *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun lament that many theologians have become specialists in arcane research that doesn’t answer basic questions of human life. “It is hard for theology to persist when it has forgotten its purpose: to critically discern, articulate, and commend visions of the true life in light of the person, life, and teachings of Jesus Christ. This is one complex illness that afflicts theology today, its most important crisis.”⁶ What Volf and Croasmun prescribe for the guild of scholarly theologians, Aleshire makes explicit for future seminary curricula. Moving *Beyond Profession*, he says, “I argue for a mode of theological education that stresses *formation*” (77). That word brought a big smile to my face and made my heart happy because this is precisely the approach your seminaries have already taken.

Aleshire defines the goal of formation “to be the development of a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership” (82). Revised curricula at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis retain the teaching of ministerial skills rooted in exegesis, systematics, history, and practical theology, but all is now suffused with focus on eight areas of health: spiritual, relational, physical, intellectual, vocational, cultural, emotional, and financial. President Lawrence Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne shared this about formation in their curriculum: “When we implemented our revised curriculum in 2005, we intentionally sought to connect it to the life of the church. We did that by organizing the curriculum around the pastoral acts of preaching, baptizing, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The intent was to form pastoral leaders

who had a robust academic preparation that was integrally connected to pastoral service in the local and broader church.” Both of our seminaries admit students who have been approved by district interview committees, do assessments when students arrive on campus, provide remedial help, provide guaranteed tuition, offer financial counseling through the good services of Concordia Plan Services, readily provide other counseling as needed, and work closely with the Council of Presidents for the placement of well-formed pastors into individual districts. Note: Placement into first calls is not common throughout ATS seminaries. Students at our seminaries do not have to search for positions but are confident they will be received into the Synod and welcomed by the congregations to which they are assigned. While both our seminaries continue to fine-tune the formational experience for students, the people, pastors, and officials of our Synod should know their seminaries have been ahead of the curve.

We close by coming back to governance, which I said can be good or bad, can further or hinder the mission of the institution, and we’ve seen examples of both. Most dominant in governance must be the mission of our Lord Jesus to us and through us. With the great stresses upon our seminaries, congregations, and church workers, we have the understandable temptation to turn inward, *incurvatus in se*, inward away from faithful obedience to our Lord’s words and example, and inward away from others who follow Christ. “Declining capacity creates the context for denominational blaming, defensiveness, and efforts to shore up weakened structures.”⁷ Turning outward means first and foremost turning to God in Christ. Dr. David Tiede, president emeritus of Luther Seminary, contributed to a *festschrift* for Daniel Aleshire, in which he introduces Lutheran theological education to an ecumenical audience. “To serve its evangelical confession, Lutheran theological education must turn and return, again and anew, to ‘What serves Christ’ in the faith of people, communities, and institutions. The vocation of Lutheran theological education means repentance and faith in the God who justifies the ungodly in Christ Jesus.” In that turning, Christ’s love turns us to others. Keeping the two great commandments, we learn how blessed we are, blessed in many ways but especially by our common confession. Dr. Dean Wenthe, former president of Ft. Wayne, tells about a taxi ride to the airport following the ATS’s annual Presidential Intensive Week. Dean asked the other seminary presidents about hot topics on their campuses, and they answered “the resurrection of Jesus Christ, did it really happen?” Such talk is inconceivable in our seminaries and will not be heard among us because of the close connections our seminaries have with individuals and entities through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We are bound to one another and that obligates us to one another. Daniel Aleshire:

A seminary has a contribution to make to the church body, whether or not the denomination wants to receive it, and owes the church

body its service, whether or not it really wants to extend it. These two responsibilities are sometimes oppositional and require a delicate dance: sometimes the seminary needs defending and sometimes the denomination requires an extra degree of service.⁹

Dr. Aleshire closed an interview for Concordia Seminary's video program *Word and Work* by saying, "I'm hopeful, because I believe deeply in the goodness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that this Christian way of being in the world is as wonderful a way for human beings to relate to one another and the world around them, that it is a source of human flourishing."¹⁰ I no longer have any part in such decisions, but I encourage boards of regents, seminary administrations, synodical officials, and anyone who goes to the microphone to speak about the seminaries to spend intentional time with *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*. If you don't read the book, thank you for reading this review. How blessed we are.

Endnotes

- 1 Daniel Aleshire, "Meeting Missouri: Observations from An Outsider," in *Let the Gospel Lead: Essays & Sermons in Honor of Dale A. Meyer* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2020), 21.
- 2 For example, Thomas Friedman in *Thank You for Being Late*: "The rate of technological change is now accelerating so fast that it has risen above the average rate at which most people can absorb all these changes. Many of us can't keep pace anymore." Friedman then quotes Eric Teller, "And this is causing us cultural angst." Friedman quotes Dov Seidman, "The world is not just rapidly changing, it is being dramatically reshaped—it is starting to operate differently. . . . And this reshaping is happening faster than we have yet been able to reshape ourselves, our leadership, our institutions, our societies, and our ethical choices." Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2016), 28, 31.
- 3 Dale A. Meyer and Lawrence R. Rast, Jr, "What Can We Learn from Them?," *Concordia Journal* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 10–11.
- 4 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun in their book, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 38, cite two articles about threatening times for seminaries, Libby A. Nelson, "The Struggling Seminaries," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 29, 2013; G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Seminaries Face Financial Woes," *USA Today*, March 17, 2009. Other articles about the precariousness of seminaries can be found.
- 5 Concordia Seminary was also established by charter from the legislature of the State of Missouri on February 23, 1853, fourteen years after its inception. The name given in the charter was "Concordia College of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States," which continues to this day as the legal name of our school. "Concordia Seminary" is a registered DBA, "doing business as." Interestingly, Washington University in St. Louis was chartered by the legislature in the same session.
- 6 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 45.
- 7 Aleshire, "Meeting Missouri," 22.
- 8 Barbara G. Wheeler, ed., *Disruption and Hope: Religious Traditions and the Future of Theological Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 19.
- 9 Aleshire, "Meeting Missouri," 19.
- 10 <https://concordiatheology.org/2021/05/the-future-of-theological-education/>

Homiletical Helps

Anatomy of a Sermon

A Sermon on Isaiah 9:2–7

By Erik H. Herrmann

Peter Nafzger

Author's note: the following sermon was preached at Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Louis, on December 24, 2011. The sermon is represented in italic type below which can be read all at once by following the gray bars in the margin.

When students sign up to take a class with Dr. Erik Herrmann, they know what they're getting. He's a historian who specializes in Reformation and Luther studies. Which means he spends an inordinate amount of time reading 500-year-old German and Latin texts. But students still sign up—even the less historically inclined—because the history they learn in his courses is neither stale nor staid. He is known for bringing insights from the church's past into the church's present toward a more faithful future.

This sermon, preached to everyday Christians in his home congregation on Christmas Eve, is an example of what this looks like from the pulpit. Aware of the potential impact of images in contemporary communication, Herrmann proclaims the historical, biblical gospel using culturally engaging means. As you read this sermon, allow his use of images to shape your experience of the gospel.

Well . . . it is finally here. The hustle and bustle of the Christmas season is coming to a close. Hopefully all our shopping is done, perhaps some have already begun opening presents (like at my house), wearing tonight our new sweaters and ties and jewelry. But we have all gathered here now and we've come to celebrate and to contemplate the great wonder of the birth of the Christ child.

One of the challenges of preaching at the holidays is the unique composition of the congregation. Vestiges of Christendom resurface, and sanctuaries come closer to capacities of yesteryear. I remember my first Christmas Eve as a pastor. I was anticipating a celebration of the incarnation with members of the congregation whom I had grown to know and love during my first five months in ministry. But that's not what happened. As I stood up to welcome the congregation, I found myself looking at mostly strangers. I quickly learned this was common. Unfamiliar congregations

tend to show up at Christmas and Easter for many reasons. Some out of obligation (out-of-town relatives), some out of nostalgia (former members), some out of curiosity (random passers-by), and some for reasons unknown—perhaps even to themselves. The challenge for the preacher is that much can't be assumed about these hearers. They might be mature Christians, biblically literate and eager to dig into the Scriptures. Or they might be unfamiliar with historic Christianity and the biblical narrative. Or they might be opposed to the Christian faith with tragic experiences of abuse or neglect. The preacher has no relationship with them or their experiences.

The beginning of the sermon matters especially for unknown hearers. You don't need to earn their attention. They have already given it to you. But you have a shorter leash. Your job is to recognize their attention as a gift, invite them to stay with you, and orient them toward the goal for the sermon.

Wisely, Herrmann begins the sermon by taking nothing for granted. He meets his unfamiliar hearers where our culture has left them—at the end of a hectic season. The “hustle and bustle” has afforded little opportunity for thoughtful reflection on the things of God. Herrmann acknowledges his own participation in this culture (“like at my house”) and signals that he will try to help them slow down to “contemplate the great wonder” of the reason for their gathering. The invitation has been extended.

We have had various pieces of art that have accompanied our readings and carols this night and so I would like us to consider one more—another picture of the nativity—with the goal that alongside the words of the prophet Isaiah—“for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” we might once again receive with awe, gratitude, and faith this gift of God.

There are many familiar images of that event—the nativity of Christ. Most paintings are inviting, peaceful scenes, like the one that was up just before. I always find it interesting how even though the child is in a feeding trough, he remarkably always looks comfortable and happy—with arms stretched up as if begging to be picked up and hugged! And the glow of the faces are a mixture of sanctity—the blending of halos—and the expression of joy and wonder of the holy family. But the picture I would like us to consider tonight is different.

As a historian, Herrmann knows the significance images have played in the history of Christian teaching and preaching. Luther's use of woodcuts in the Small Catechism, which were originally printed as posters with pictures, is just one example. Stained-glass windows, altarpiece paintings, carvings, and statues have long helped the people of God visualize the truths of the Christian faith.

It's also true that images have recently become a dominant means of communication on their own. More than enhancing written communication, images have, in many cases, replaced textual communication. There are currently one billion

active members of the image-driven social media platform Instagram. In contrast, there are 353 million active members on the text-driven Twitter. Three times as many people choose to follow images rather than words. And that's to say nothing of the increasingly common use of emojis and memes that supplement and, at times, replace our "text" threads.

In a sermon, there are two ways in which a preacher might use an image. One option is to *describe* the image. This is nothing new. Radio preachers have long recognized the power of description. But preaching with images goes back much farther than Walter A. Maier. Paul painted a picture of the church as a body. Jesus likened the reign of God to a mustard seed. Isaiah portrayed heaven as a feast. The benefit to describing images is that it enables the hearers to participate in the mental construction of the image. This can make the image more personal for the hearers and the sermon more engaging. But the preacher has another option. He could also *display* the image. This isn't new, either. Jeremiah held up a piece of pottery. Jesus pointed to a fig tree. Peter motioned to the beggar he had just healed. The advantage to displaying an image is that it unites all the hearers around a single visualization of the idea at hand.

With the technology of bulletins and screens, the possibilities for contemporary preachers to display images has expanded considerably. In this sermon, Herrmann made use of the congregation's projector. After recalling several other images from earlier in the service, he draws attention to the first of two images that will provide structure and guidance for the sermon.



The Holy Virgin (2002–2004)
by Sergei Chepik © 2004

I showed this painting to my brother-in-law yesterday and he said, “Yeah, that’s not going out on any of my Christmas cards.” This painting entitled “The Holy Virgin” is by Sergei Chepik and was commissioned for St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. In this painting, Mary is dressed as a beggar woman, emaciated, and pale. The Christ child stands not as an infant meek and mild but as a thin, sickly young boy. His arms are outstretched though hardly as an invitation for embrace. An angel strains at the bells. For what do they toll? Peace? War?

But tonight I want us to focus on the face of Mary.

They say images are worth a thousand words. It’s true. But the ability of images to communicate a concrete and specific message is unlikely, at best. Which is where the preacher comes in. With precision made possible by words, the preacher highlights details from the image to communicate ideas through multiple senses to multiple intelligences. That is, the image helps the pastor engage the individual listener more holistically, and it helps the pastor engage more than one type of listener.¹

When displaying an image—either on a screen, a bulletin insert, or by showing a physical object—the preacher must be intentional about managing the details. This is one of the challenges with displaying rather than describing an image. The pastor uses the image to serve the proclamation. If not careful, the image will use the pastor by allowing unintended details from the image to send the hearers’ minds wandering in unhelpful directions. In this case, notice how quickly Herrmann moves from the larger image toward the face of Mary.



The Holy Virgin, *close up*

What do you see? . . . What is she looking at? Look at that expression—this is not the usual face of Mary at Christmas—where is the peace, the joy? She looks . . . horrified, terrified, grief stricken. What is she looking at that would yield such an expression?

This question ignites the active participation of the hearers. Herrmann asks the hearers to stand in Mary’s position and imagine what she is looking at that causes her unexpected expression. Indirectly, he invites them to wonder what would bring such an expression to their own faces.

After asking a thought-provoking question like this, it is a good idea for the preacher to give the hearers a few moments to consider their answer. Then, after a brief pause, proceed to offer some assistance. To help his hearers, Herrmann continues by suggesting a few potential and strategically arranged answers.

Perhaps, she is looking out at our world. At the crazy commercialization of Christmas—how consumerism and materialism have run rampant and ruined this holy time of year. Maybe she is looking in sorrow and disbelief as she sees the world use the birth of her son as an occasion for greed and selfishness. From “Black Friday” until this very day the streets and stores have been filled with crowds in shopping frenzy—mouses on home computers clicking incessantly on free shipping deals, PayPal logins, and two-for-one specials. I suspect many of us have similar looks as Mary here when we see the stores display Christmas decorations in October, with every commercial, and ad, and magazine exploiting the holiday for monetary gain. Perhaps she is looking out at the garish lights and superficial holiday jingles and stands here horrified at the lack of generosity, the lack of good will, and the lack of charity in our world.

But maybe she is more near-sighted than that. What if her gaze does not go past these walls but rests upon us . . . here gathered in this room? What does she see? Does she see a group of people who are different than what we see in the world? Americans spend 450-billion dollars every year . . . at Christmas. I suspect that when we look at our credit card bills next month, we will see that we have helped America reach that number again this year. What if we would take some of the money that otherwise would have been spent on sweaters or slippers or a blue-ray DVD player and pool it together in order to help the suffering, the poor, the oppressed? For example, it is estimated that for 20-billion dollars a year, everyone in the world could have access to clean drinking water—that’s less than 5 percent of what Americans spend on Christmas. Maybe Mary is seeing what the church could be doing and yet sees that we so often fail to do it.

Or maybe her sight is even sharper, so that her gaze penetrates beyond the veneer of Christmas cheer down to the heart . . . to my heart. And there her eyes behold my own selfishness, in spite of the “season of giving,” my own reluctance to give, my thoughtlessness, my neglect of my neighbor in need. I had some high hopes this year—that I would commit some significant time to help the needy, comfort the lonely, give to the poor—but my generosity once again shrunk like shrink wrap around my immediate worries, hardly making it beyond the boundaries of my usual relationships. As this peasant woman presents her son to the world, maybe she looks into our hearts, and she is grieved to see our impoverished giving. Maybe she is looking at who we are, what we have, and what we offer, and she is shocked, she is saddened.

The movement in these three paragraphs is intentional and smart. They are ordered from least to most intimate. The first answer is safe and impersonal. Perhaps Mary is looking at our world and its “crazy commercialization of Christmas.” This answer is easy for hearers to accept. Who can deny the “shopping

frenzy,” the “garish lights,” and the “superficial holiday jingles” that demean the season? By starting with a broad and abstract target (the culture), Herrmann makes it easy for hearers to agree.

With the second answer, he moves closer to home. Rather than imagining her gaze fixed on the culture, perhaps she is looking at the church. This might catch some Christians off guard, particularly those who equate faithfulness in December with fighting for the right to say, “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays.” With a few easily obtained statistics, Herrmann exposes how the church has been shaped by the crass commercialization it rightly laments. This ecclesial self-criticism might make the regulars squirm a little. But it might also open a way for those who have come out of obligation to soften and stay tuned.

The third answer leaves no room for the hearers to look elsewhere. Herrmann names ways in which these specific hearers bear responsibility for Mary’s expression. But notice *how* he does this. Rather than directly accusing them (remember, he does not have a relationship with many of them), he begins by accusing himself. “To *my* heart . . . *my own* reluctance to give, *my* thoughtlessness, *my* neglect of *my* neighbor in need.” He’s confessing his own sin. In doing so, he indirectly invites his hearers to join him in honest but silent repentance. Then, subtly, he switches from the first-person singular to the first-person plural. What was indirect becomes unavoidable: “Maybe she is looking at who *we* are, what *we* have, what *we* offer.” The hearers are now in the same boat. There’s nowhere to run. We are all to blame.

I suppose all of these are possibilities . . . for all of these carry a large measure of truth.

But what is she really looking at? This painting hangs in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. It is the first of four in a series of paintings hung in the nave on pillars that face each other. And if you were to stand before this painting and turn to match your line of sight with hers, you would see it. You would see what she is looking at—with eyes wide with terror and moist with sadness.

This is the key move for this sermon. Rather than more speculation about Mary’s view of culture, church, or hearers, Herrmann allows the arrangement Chepik’s paintings inside St. Paul’s Cathedral to help with this transition. He answers his own question by inviting the hearers to look where Mary’s eyes lead them, which is at another painting.² This builds suspense for the next picture and sets the stage for the proclamation of the gospel promise.

In his homiletical instruction, Dr. David Schmitt notes that there are six different perspectives a preacher can take when he uses an image in a sermon. He can invite the hearers to look (1) behind the image (by examining the background of its creation), (2) in front of the image (by reflecting on how the image impacts the one who views

it), (3) about the image (by considering the composition of the image), (4) around the image (by considering the setting in which it is found), (5) within the image (by entering the narrative world of the image), and (6) through the image (by construing the image as a lens through which to view the world).³ At this point, Herrmann invites the hearers to look “around the image” in St. Paul’s Cathedral and let the physical placement of the image help make sense of Mary’s expression.

Across from her is Chepik’s enormous painting of Golgotha. She is staring at her son, in the midst of suffering—her son stretched out on the cross. She is not looking at what the world or the church, or any of us give or don’t give at Christmas. She is looking at what she has given, what God has given, what her Son has given for the life of the world. Not our gifts, but this gift—this is Christmas. “For unto us a child is born, for unto us a son is given.”



The Passion (2002–2004) by Sergei Chepik
© 2004. Photo credit: Hugh Kelly

generous, giving people with the ability to help not only ourselves but others. We like Dickens’ Christmas story of Ebenezer Scrooge—for it suggests that Christmas brings out the best in us—and that even the stingiest among us can become generous,

This paragraph is outstanding. With the change in perspective (from Mary looking at us toward Mary looking at Jesus), Herrmann redirects attention away from the hearers and draws attention to Jesus as God’s gift to the world. This redirection is appropriate in every sermon, for we always have a hard time not focusing on ourselves. But this is especially true at Christmas as we spend even more time and energy thinking about the gifts we give and receive.

It is actually a bit of an unwelcome, uncomfortable thing to be on the receiving end of such an enormous gift. We don’t like to admit that we are helpless at Christmas; I think we’d prefer to think of ourselves as a relatively

giving people. But the Christmas story of the Gospels is about God's unimaginable gift to the world, even when the world didn't think it needed it . . . even when much of the world would not receive it. ("He came unto his own," reads the first chapter of John, "and his own received him not.") Christmas is about a helpless world, lost in darkness, that receives its great light.



The Passion, *close up*

It was not immediately obvious to Mary (or anyone else) that Jesus's death was good news. That is what makes Chepik's depiction authentic. By portraying her face in this way, Chepik follows the biblical narrative as it is told in the four Gospels and the apostolic preaching in Acts. Jesus died a tortuous death because he claimed to be God (Jn 19:7). His own people would not accept his claims, so they put him to death. It was

not until after his resurrection that Mary, the disciples, or anyone else would be able to see and believe that his crucifixion was also a gift of sacrificial love.

Herrmann accounts for this by pointing out the irony that the light of the world came to a world lost in darkness. Then he hints toward the resurrection with language of light. It is only in the emerging dawn of Easter Sunday that we can see that Good Friday is actually good. Even then, Jesus's death remains an appalling indictment on a creation that remains so thoroughly in the dark.

Our passage from Isaiah illustrates this dramatically. At the time when Isaiah penned these words, the ten tribes of northern Israel (which included the region of Galilee) had been destroyed by the Assyrian empire and Judah was now a vassal, under the oppressive rule of the Assyrian king. The people of Israel were utterly

helpless—in “anguish” says the text, and “contempt,” dwelling in “deep darkness.” But then comes the unimaginable gift: the rod of the oppressor—broken; the tyrannical rule of the enemy—overthrown. Instead, a child will be born—the gift of the promised king and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his reign will bring everlasting peace—he will rule with justice and righteousness forever. How will this happen—will Israel bring this about? Will some generous benefactor, prince, or hero? No, “the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” This gift—a child set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a child born to die, God’s Son—this is what Christmas is all about. We come to this place with empty hands . . . kneeling at the altar . . . receiving the greatest gift that God has ever given.

At this point Herrmann explores the context of the appointed reading from Isaiah. After a summary of the historical-political situation, he emphasizes the prophet’s promise of a child-king who would overthrow the enemy and reign in justice for all eternity. The challenge in dealing with a text like Isaiah—which was composed in a very different time and place (eighth-century BC, Israel)—is that too much textual background may be difficult for unfamiliar hearers to follow, much less comprehend. Especially at this point in the sermon, hearers at an evening service may be prone to drift. Herrmann mitigates this danger by limiting the amount of background information he shares and moving quickly to the key verse (Is 9:6), which is perhaps familiar even to this unfamiliar congregation.

For me, this key verse recalls the face of Jesus from the first painting. Herrmann didn’t return to it in his sermon, but I might have displayed the first image one more time with a close-up of his face and open arms.

Unlike Mary’s face, which was looking above the hearers to the Golgotha painting, the boy’s face is looking directly at the viewer. Indeed, he is looking directly at the people gathered together for worship on this holy night. “What child is this?” I might have asked. He is the gift of God, the light of the world, the one who lived and died and rose and reigns over all. For us. For you. He is wise beyond his years and gracious beyond our deserving. His open arms not only preview his arms stretched on the cross, but also invite us to respond by embracing his promise of eternal peace and the self-sacrificing life to which Herrmann now turns.



We began with the face of Mary—she endured much, she gave much, but like us, she received even more. Perhaps, we are like her—yes, the church is surprisingly like Mary. We have heard the promise and in hearing that word in faith a miracle has been conceived in us. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church indeed bears Christ as a mother would a child—a treasure in our midst. But also like Mary, the church does not clutch the Christ child, keeping the babe to herself alone, but she gives this child to the world. Giving this gift—this gift of Jesus to the world is not easy. It is usually not like the pleasant exchange of gifts we look forward to this time of year. In fact, in giving this gift we often suffer . . . it’s like dying really . . . dying to ourselves and living for another. In this, our gift and the gift of God become one, we find ourselves looking more like our Savior . . . members of his body . . . bearing the burdens of others as living sacrifices. See how uncomfortable such a gift can be? It transforms us into a people that we may not be quite ready to be. And yet God gives it to us anyway . . . a baby . . . unto us, born and given. Amen.

Here at the end of the sermon Herrmann points toward the new life that awaits all who receive this gift and Son of God. Like Mary, we are called to give this gift to others through our gracious witness, as well as through our suffering and dying “and living for another.” We celebrate his birth by learning to bear “the burdens of others as living sacrifices” as God transforms us into the image of his Son.

The images in this sermon together with the clear proclamation of the commands and promises of God in Christ, accomplished in a culturally appropriate and engaging way what the preacher must accomplish on Christmas Eve (and in every other sermon). They ensured that all the hearers of this sermon, who have gathered for a variety of reasons, went home with a similar experience, namely, an encounter with the historical, biblical gospel of Jesus Christ on this most holy night of his birth.

Endnotes

- 1 For more about considering multiple intelligences in preaching, see Thomas H. Troeger and H. Edward Everding, Jr. *So that All Might Know: Preaching that Engages the Whole Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).
- 2 This sermon follows a “Multiple Image” structure by using two images to organize the sermon’s main ideas. See <https://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/dynamic/imagistic-structures/multiple-image/> for more about this sermon structure.
- 3 Herrmann makes use of multiple perspectives in the sermon, including “within the image” and “in front of the image.” For more details about these six perspectives, as well as examples of what it looks like to use them in preaching, see Schmitt’s lecture at the 2011 Day of Homiletical Reflection at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis <https://scholar.csl.edu/hom/2011/schedule/3/>.

Reviews

HANDING DOWN THE FAITH: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation. By Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk. Oxford University Press, 2021. 264 pages. Hardcover. \$29.95.

Handing Down the Faith by Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk describes families as uniquely positioned to pass their religion on to the next generation. It sheds light on *how* and *why* the home is the key player in this process, and increasingly so in today's changing cultural landscape.

Common methodologies have often centered faith formation in religious congregations. Smith and Adamczyk write that the key players are parents, "not clergy, religious schools, youth ministers, neighborhoods, Sunday school, mission trips, summer camps, peers, or the media" (69). They find that, "The key location is the home, not religious congregations. And the key mechanisms of socialization are the formation of ordinary life practices and identities, not programs, preaching, or formal rites of passage" (70). Yet, according to their findings, religious congregations and clergy *also* have significant contributions

to make when the primary role of the home is incorporated into their approach as is emphasized below.

Principal researcher and author, Christian Smith, is professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame. He has conducted research and published works on religion and youth, including "The National Study of Youth and Religion"

which brought to prominence the term "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005). Amy Adamczyk, another lead researcher and coauthor, is professor of sociology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City College of New York.

Their study included 230 detailed in-depth

interviews using a stratified quota sampling method that included two-parent, single, divorced, and blended families across representative cultural demographics. The research sample was parents who are religiously minded and desire to see religious faith handed down. The study's central focus was on *how* a parent's faith is handed down. It examined various faith groups; the *content* of belief



does not factor into the study. The authors also examined other nationally representative surveys to provide a framework for the interview results.

Here are the findings that inform both parents and clergy. First, for parents:

1. Religiously minded parents *do* largely believe they have the primary responsibility of faith transmission, that it falls to them, not their congregations. This contradicts a common stereotype that says religious parents do not own this responsibility. It is important to emphasize the study was of *religious* parents who *desire* to hand down their faith.
2. Parent religiousness, an “authoritative” parenting style, and religious conversations are key aspects of the home’s prominence in raising children in a religious faith.

An authoritative parenting style is warm and engaging but places high expectations on the religious life and standards expected of children. When this parenting style is prevalent among religiously minded parents so is religious faith transmission to the children.

Regarding religious conversations in the home, this study is unique among recent research in closely examining the impact of such conversations on faith transmission. It found that when they occur naturally and frequently in the home, that faith was passed on at a *significantly* higher rate. This is a key finding of the study. The authors write: “If there were only one practical take-

away from our research, it would be this: parents need not only to ‘walk the walk’ but also regularly to *talk* with their children about their walk, what it means, why it matters, why they care” (225).

3. Smith and Adamczyk’s work describes why parents are especially important for raising children in the faith: (a) research shows that youth commonly *do* respect adult values, (b) religious language and the ability to have conversations about faith is learned most naturally *in* the home, and (c) large-scale sociological changes in the culture have *positioned* the family for faith transmission to children.

Regarding large sociological changes, the authors put forth a speculative thesis that American religion changed from being a “communal solidarity project” to a “personal identity accessory.” This shifted religion out of a dominant place in society. It has also positioned the home to more naturally pass on religious faith to children than congregational authority figures and programs. Parents influence what gets talked about and valued in the home. If faith is held as important, conversations can “decompartmentalize” religion so that it is no longer a mere “personal identity accessory.” Faith can thus be seen as integral to everyday life on into adulthood.

Second, the research findings guide pastors and religious congregations:

1. Religious congregations matter most by generating parental “religiousness.” Parents and the home being primary in this work, “does not mean religious traditions do not matter. They do. But the way they matter most, according to these results, is by generating differences in levels of parental religiousness, which is what finally drives children’s service attendance and conversations with parents about religious matters” (196).

This identifies a challenge for clergy and congregations, namely to provide faith formation for the parents themselves to enhance their own faith life. The challenge is heightened by the fact that research indicates most adults do not highly value adult religious formation. For example, participation in adult Bible studies is shown to be a low priority for most.

2. Another way this research guides religious leaders is in describing what parents look for from congregations. Parents desire for churches to provide religious education, especially the teaching of morality. They also look to congregations to facilitate fun religious experiences for children and to be a source of age-similar friends who share their religious faith. Parents also value churches as safe and supportive communities, seeing them as refuges within a larger culture often averse to religious life.

The summary above focused on the book’s central theme of the home’s prominence in intergenerational faith transmission. The book also provides helpful information on related aspects, like the impact of parents’ own religious upbringing on handing down the faith to their children, the influence of grandparents, and a study of the experience of new immigrants seeking to pass on religious faith within a different culture, to name a few.

Overall, this study gives helpful insight to both parents and clergy. In a culture where the fear of failing to raise children in religious faith is common among parents, pastors, and religious leaders, *Handing Down the Faith* provides sound research and insightful analysis to help those concerned to do this work.

W. Mart Thompson

**FORMING RESILIENT CHILDREN:
The Role of Spiritual Formation
for Healthy Development.** By Holly
Catterton Allen. InterVarsity Press, 2021.
200 pages. Softcover. \$24.00.

In *Forming Resilient Children*, Holly Allen gives guidance for “forming” children to adapt and thrive in the face of life’s challenges and traumas. She employs a cross-disciplinary approach that applies social science research within a particular conception of “spirituality.” Allen’s work is situated as part of the emerging field of “resilience” studies. She pictures the desired outcome this way,

“If a child who has suffered significant hardship is later said to be managing the developmental tasks typical for their age and context well enough, the child is considered to be resilient” (28). Her intended audience for developing such resiliency in children includes parents, clergy, teachers, and counselors. She marshals her findings to serve both in religious (especially Christian) but also secular environments.

Allen provides a helpful survey of the growing body of literature on this topic. She makes a strong case for the priority of stable and religious homes in forming resilience. Allen also describes churches as a place where this occurs, especially when programming is intentionally intergenerational. She presents her findings to the reader in an accessible manner using stories, giving clear definitions, and providing practical guidance and concrete applications. Allen’s illustrations of children dealing with trauma include contemporary events which most readers will recognize from news stories, like the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, enslavement of child soldiers, adapting to the current pandemic, along with very personal but all too pervasive sources of trauma like sexual abuse, death, and divorce. Parents and pastors, Sunday school and public-school teachers, are all given practical examples to follow in seeking to cultivate resilience in both little ones and youth in the face of such struggles and traumatic events.

It is important to note, however, that the employment of the term “spiritual” in this work is anthropologically based. It focuses on the human need for children to be engaged relationally, especially in “spiritual” conversations. This is her definition: “Children’s spirituality is a quality present in every child from birth by which children seek to establish relationship with self, others, and God (as they understand God)” (22). The book, therefore, is not guided by a particular formulation of Christian doctrine regarding God’s action in Christ. The teachings of sin and grace centered in Jesus Christ or the hope that is given through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as a means of attending to children suffering from trauma are not brought out in this work. Christian caregivers will need to make those applications in their specific contexts.

With that qualification in mind, there is much good “First Article” wisdom in the pages of *Forming Resilient Children*. The importance of adults having spiritual conversations in the home, at church, or wherever such relationships can be nurtured with children, is a case well-made in this book. In an increasingly depersonalized but often traumatized society, the insights offered by Allen make this a very helpful resource for those desiring to cultivate resilience in children.

W. Mart Thompson

**INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE
WITH THE GREAT TRADITION:
Recovering the Genius of
Premodern Exegesis.** By Craig A.
Carter. Baker Academic, 2018. 304
pages. Paperback. \$29.00.

To fully appreciate the ingenuity of premodern exegesis, we need to have a right metaphysics in place. This right metaphysics, which Craig Carter meticulously argues in this work, is Christian Platonism. In chapter 1, Carter states his problem by sharing his frustration as a freshly graduated seminarian who knew all the modern hermeneutical theories and methods of criticisms but remained impotent in fulfilling his pastoral duty—to faithfully expound the “Fourth Servant Song” in Isaiah 53 as messianic prophecy that points to Christ. The frustration embodied a deep gulf between the Academy and the Church, which in turn created conflict between two different approaches of the nature of the text (9). To overcome the gulf, Carter firmly argues, one needs to reclaim the Christian Platonist metaphysics of the Great Tradition fundamental to the theology of Scripture, rather than be taken captive to the Epicurean naturalistic metaphysics of the Enlightenment on which modern historical criticism was based.

Having laid out the projected solution to the problem, Carter proceeds to his main account of the work. The rest of the book is evenly divided into two parts, each with three chapters.

The first part (chapters 2–4) deals with theological hermeneutics. In chapter 2, Carter provides a theology of Scripture, namely, “a true understanding of the inspired status of the text we are reading” (33). Drawing heavily from theologians such as John Webster, Hans Boersma, and Matthew Levering, Carter calls for a “theological metaphysics” from which the Nicene doctrine of God was derived (34). The God of classical theism is both a transcendent and personal God. Scriptures as the inspired word of God “mediate the reality of the Second Person of the Trinity to us as creaturely realities taken up into the God and sanctified for this purpose” (59). In chapter 3, Carter continues to depict what he means by “the theological metaphysics of the Great Tradition.” For him, it is Christian Platonism, the only ontological account upon which the right understanding of the nature of the Scripture can be found. Why Christian Platonism? Because it best captures the “sacramental-historical” nature of Christianity. Christianity is sacramental because Christians believe “this world participates in a reality greater than itself and is only a shadow of this greater reality” (83). This is the Platonist aspect of Christianity. Christianity is also historical in nature for Christians confess that the second person of the Trinity has come into history to redeem humanity. Therefore we need “Christian” to qualify Platonism in the use of our metaphysical description. In chapter 4, Carter recounts the history of biblical interpretation for

the sake of depicting the rise and fall of the “orthodox consensus” of reading Scripture. From the early church till the eve of the Enlightenment, there was a hermeneutical consensus concerning the Scripture held by most Christians which included beliefs such as the authority of Scripture, the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, and the christological content of the Christian Bible (98–107). With the emergence of modernity, however, the consensus began to stumble. The biblical critics of the Enlightenment replaced the orthodox consensus with historical criticism on the basis of a naturalistic worldview. With the loss of Christian Platonism as the metaphysical basis of our Bibliology, our reading of Scripture falls prey to theological liberalism.

The second part (chapters 5–7) explores three chief themes of premodern exegesis that Carter seeks to recover for the sake of reforming modern hermeneutical theory to be in tune with the Great Tradition: (1) the Bible as a unity centered on Jesus Christ; (2) the meaning of Scripture as *sensus plenior*; and (3) Christ as the eternal Word who speaks through the Old Testament to us. Again, for Carter, only Christian Platonism, which itself is the proper metaphysical basis underlying the Scripture, can provide these three themes as a hermeneutical framework which guide our reading of the Scripture.

I am in general sympathetic to Carter’s criticisms of modern historical criticism in favor of the hermeneutical insights offered by the premodern

exegesis. I think Carter is right in his address of the relationship between literal and spiritual senses by arguing that the hermeneutical move from literal to spiritual meaning can only make sense in the metaphysical conviction that “God is not limited to one point on that timeline of history but encloses time within himself and transcends time in the incomprehensible mystery of his unique being” (175). It is a good reminder to those who hold the premodern exegesis dubious at best, if not downright irresponsible, that the advocates of Scripture as *sensus plenior* are not necessarily reckless and slanted exegetes who twist the plain sense of the text at their own pleasure. Carter insists that “the spiritual meaning of the text often goes beyond the limits of what the literal sense says, but all spiritual meaning must be consistent with, and grow out of, the literal sense of the text” (170). Some quibbles, however, concerning Carter’s overall project:

1. Christian Platonism is a catchword for Carter covering the general metaphysical attitude of all Christians of the premodern period. However, the author seems to equate Aristotelianism with Platonism without elucidating the differences. I am quite perplexed when encountering phrases like “the Christian Platonism of High Middle Ages, symbolized above all by Thomas Aquinas” (86) and “in harmony with the Christian Platonism of Thomas

Aquinas” (170). To be fair, Carter does offer a brief sketch of “Ur-Platonism” in which all forms of Platonism are held in common (79–81). However, it remains an open question to what extent Aristotelianism is compatible with “Ur-Platonism.”

2. Carter’s articulation of late medieval nominalism is over-simplistic and one-sided. With Michael Gillespie’s account of the origins of modernity as his main source (86–87), nominalism becomes for Carter the chief culprit of the early rise of modernity, which brought forth a new concept of God as sheer will and irrational, and as such must be overcome under human control (113–114). However, Gillespie’s thesis remains one among many theories that seek to give account of the rise of modernity.
3. As opposed to Carter’s opinion, it is highly unlikely that John Calvin represented the culmination of patristic exegesis and the Great Tradition (235). It is well-known among Reformation scholarship that Calvin’s alleged “Judaizing” tendency in his reading of the traditional christological Psalms (Pss 2, 8, 16, 22, 45, 72, 110, 118) brought him posthumously under attack of the Lutheran theologian Aegidius Hunnius. Whether Hunnius’s argument against Calvin stands is another question, but it seems to me that Calvin at the very least

would have cast a suspicious eye on Augustine’s prosopological exegesis of the Psalter, to whom every Psalm could be interpreted christologically because “in the Psalms Christ actually speaks” (204).

4. My biggest dissatisfaction of this work lies not in what the author has said, but rather what he has not—the absence of any serious discussion of the great sixteenth-century exegete Martin Luther. I would argue that Luther would have been a better representative than Calvin as the culmination of the premodern exegesis of the Reformation as Luther was famous in his striving to find Christ throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalter, an attitude which made Luther a definite successor of Augustine.

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FAULT LINES: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe. By Voddie T. Baucham, Jr. Salem Books, 2021. 251 pages. Hardcover. \$15.00.

Dr. Baucham is no stranger to controversy. For over twenty years he has been on the front lines of cultural apologetics in the conservative evangelical realm, often drawing ire from other high-profile church leaders for his advocacy of home education,

complementarianism, and biblical historicity. His confident demeanor, quick wit, and debate skill has been demonstrated time and again in a wide variety of topics effecting the church at large, and he has often been criticized by other black leaders as “selling out” the black community.

Baucham’s most recent work masterfully depicts the underpinnings, history, and trajectory of Critical Race Theory and intersectionality (CRT/I) and its catastrophically divisive philosophy (like ever-shifting tectonic plates, from which the book derives its title). After describing Marxist beginnings and recent developments of CRT/I from scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Robin DiAngelo, and Ibram X. Kendi, Baucham likens the theorization to a cult. CRT/I, Social Justice Theory, and Antiracism form a new religion with no soteriology, no forgiveness, and no hope for the future.

He displays (with many contemporary proofs) the tenets of this new religion in creative fashion, mirroring the six days of creation, wherein white people created whiteness, an invisible privilege, white supremacy, white complicity, white equilibrium, and white fragility on each successive day. This new religion is replete with a new original sin (systemic racism), a new law (antiracism), and a new priesthood (non-whites). Most alarming is the religious tenet he calls “ethnic Gnosticism,” which is a subjective narratology that presumes itself and establishes a Kafka trap

wherein any denial of systemic racism is further proof of racism; there need be no actual racists or racist actions—racism is a given and is solely the possession of whites and “whiteness.” He peppers the work with examples of media narratives, showing that objectivity and facts are irrelevant since “narrative is an alternative, and ultimately superior, truth” (94). “Christians simply must reject this worldview” in favor of the truth of Scripture, for no other concept of justice is greater than God’s, which is meted out finally on the cross.

The book is a straightforward—if often alarming—read with provocative autobiography fronting the matter. Though deferential toward honest scholarship in many ways, Baucham does not mince words in the clarion call to Christians who take up the mantle of CRT/I, strongly declaring that “it is the antiracists who have abandoned the Gospel since, in their view, there is no good news of grace. There is only law” (87). Put simply, Baucham believes that CRT/I, Social Justice Theory, and Antiracism *further* divides rather than heals, and he proves that it is rooted in anti-biblical concepts that prey upon the Christian’s desire to love their neighbor.

It is refreshing to read such a comprehensive work on the recent meteoric rise of CRT/I and Social Justice Theory that denies the premise that social unity apart from Christ is possible. Baucham’s astute observations on CRT/I has been building for years in other works, videos, and blogs. He refers to many of his social-political predictions of

old that have come to fruition in almost prophetic fashion; thus, it would be foolhardy to wave away the predictions he relays in this work. Contrary to other books on this topic, his stated goal is not to “bridge the gap” or heal the fault, but to declare its present danger to the church and encourage the reader to find themselves on the correct (read: biblical) side. Unsurprisingly, as a staunch student of the Bible, his final plea to readers is that they stand firm on the gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls—all of whom are *individually* fallen and in need of a savior. Like the apostles he copiously cites, Baucham desires this of his readers “not so you can defeat your brethren in an argument, but so that you can engage them with the hopes of winning them” (231).

In the current atmosphere, myriad extra-biblical resources exist to help Christians and church leaders “navigate” the social animosity of “systemic racism.” However well-intentioned such works might be, it is a breath of fresh air to read Baucham’s encouragements that are so unashamedly based on the theology of total depravity and the universal availability of atonement through Jesus Christ. Every pastor and Christian should keep Baucham’s *Fault Lines* close, not only to be informed as to the nature of CRT/I, but to be encouraged in their task of following and proclaiming Christ crucified for the salvation of all flesh.

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BREATH OF GOD, YET WORK OF MAN: Scripture, Philosophy, Dialogue, and Conflict. By Charles P. Schaum and Albert B. Collver III. Concordia Publishing House, 2019. Hardcover. 570 pages. \$54.99.

Up to the present date, there has been little attention paid in book-length published works to the history of theology within the church we call the “Missouri Synod.” There has been a great deal of work in this field, of course, in journal articles, seminary theses, and dissertations. The present book by Charles Schaum and Albert Collver III extends Schaum’s STM 2008 thesis at Concordia Seminary, “Biblical Hermeneutics in the Early Missouri Synod,” to the present day. In many ways, this book is more than a chronological extension of Schaum’s thesis about hermeneutics. By analyzing the historical roots of the synod’s debates over the nature of Scripture, this book also digs deep into all areas of theology, prolegomena, epistemology, methodology, and philosophy that have affected the synod’s view of Scripture.

The book is organized both topically and chronologically. The first four chapters and the last are topical: (1) Biblical authority; (2) Lutheran hermeneutics; (3) Luther’s view of Scripture; (4) the changes in theology from the orthodox Lutherans to the rationalist Lutherans; and (5) the last chapter, on world Lutheranism since 1900. The middle five chapters are chronological, from synod’s birth until

the 1974 walkout at the Saint Louis seminary. Some readers might wonder about the mixture of historical narrative and topical analysis. In my opinion, the first four topical chapters are a necessity, so that the uninformed reader may understand the “rationalism” that caused the followers of Martin Stephan to secede from the state church of Saxony and which has been considered part of the heresies to be avoided by the synod’s theologians and pastors ever since.

The last third of the book is a series of six appendices that are chock-full of data for the Lutheran historian. Most useful, in my opinion, are the appendices on Ernst Eckhardt’s *Realexicon*, selected doctrinal essays from 1865 to 1909, Lutheran theological axioms collected by C. F. W. Walther in Latin and English, and various Missouri Synod documents of its “canon law” from 1854 to 1924. Interspersed with tables, figures, ample footnotes, and ending with a comprehensive bibliography and indices, this is truly a rich offering from the authors and Concordia Publishing House!

Although anyone interested in the history of the Missouri Synod’s theology will have use for this book, its primary audiences are synodical seminary students, synodical officers, synodical theologians, theologians and scholars of other denominations, and the growing community of confessional Lutherans around the world. For the latter group, this book was published as part of the International Lutheran Council’s “Lutheran Leadership Development Program.” That means that theologians and seminarians at the Missouri Synod

“sister churches” around the globe will be invited to use and study this book. The book may also be used at the undergraduate level, but I would not recommend it as the only introductory text into the topic of Scripture. It is too “dense” for that and would frustrate every undergraduate except for the rare autodidact. The discipline of the “history of theology” is necessarily multicausal and the authors do not try to oversimplify the issues, events, or persons involved.

Why did the Missouri Synod go through a period of change in its view of Scripture when it began as a vehement protest against “rationalism”? The change is explained in the ninth chapter, “Change Becomes Revolution: 1935–1950.” The chapter title implies that theological change was happening in the Missouri Synod before that period, but in that period the “rule” (*principium cognoscendi*) of theology was changing in a part of the synod. Hermann Sasse saw the change as early as 1948 at the Saint Louis seminary during the Sieck administration (68 n. 152).

The authors’ focus, in chapter nine, on Jaroslav Pelikan (at CSL 1947–1950) and Richard Caemmerer Sr. (at CSL 1940–1974) as leaders of the “revolution” thus appears to be “on the mark,” and I think they are right. If this is so, I would like to have seen more quotations from those theologians. But the reader can find those theologians’ essays and books easily enough in our Lutheran libraries, so that is a minor criticism. Caemmerer’s bibliography is found in his *festschrift* (*The Lively*

Function of the Gospel). Pelikan's select bibliography is on Wikipedia.

The synod's debate, and ultimately conflict, about Scripture was unavoidable. That was because the synod's members were infatuated with all things German, and they still are! When synod's theologians were imbibing nineteenth- and twentieth-century German philosophy or theology, which is indebted to Leibniz, Wolff, Lessing, Herder, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel (18, 35–45), they were on truly treacherous ground. "God" means something else to those philosophers and their theological counterparts in the nineteenth century (46–61). In German philosophy and theology since Leibniz, "God" is "in" mankind, not outside of mankind, so when the civil society, or the churchly society, agree on something, then "God" has spoken; and that is believed to be superior to the ancient oracles found in Scripture. The exception to this panentheistic perspective is found in Kant and the neo-Kantians. For a comprehensive survey of this subject, see: Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Judson Press, 1973).

Even though it is quite complicated, the authors' review of German philosophy and theology throughout the book is necessary and quite helpful. It was out of ignorance of these German sources that part of the Missouri Synod was led astray for a time.

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THE COMMENTARY OF ORIGEN ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW.

*Translated by Roland E. Heine. 2
Volumes. Oxford Early Christian Texts.
Oxford University Press, 2018. 792 pages.
Hardcover. \$270.00.*

Though controversial in his own time and beyond, Origen of Alexandria placed his own indelible stamp on the history of exegesis. His commentaries, monumental in size and scope, exude a concordance-like knowledge of the biblical text. At the same time, his spiritual or figurative interpretations (often labelled allegories, though he himself tended to use that label minimally) have generated lively discussions on hermeneutics through the ages. This specific commentary is the oldest one extant on Matthew and the largest of Origen's surviving works, even in its incomplete state (v). Roland Heine, then, has done a tremendous service in introducing, translating, and briefly annotating the most complete edition of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* in English.

One can begin to appreciate Heine's immense contribution simply by realizing the complex textual state of the commentary. Some of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* is already available in the public domain and reprint editions from John Patrick's 1896 translation in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF 9:411–512). However, Patrick's translation is only of books 10–14 (Mt 13:36–19:11) with two brief snippets from books 1 and 2. In his first volume,

Heine translates the surviving Greek text of books 10–17 (Mt 13:36–22:33). In the second, he translates a Latin version running from book 12, chapter 9 to book 17 (Mt 16:13–22:33) known as the *Vetus Interpretatio* (29). Though secondary and overlapping with the Greek, the *Vetus Interpretatio* has its own “omissions, additions, and peculiarities in the way some key Greek terms of Origen are rendered” (30). Comparing the Latin and the Greek also offers clues to evaluate the Latin translation for the portions unavailable in Greek. After the *Vetus Interpretatio*, Heine translates the *Series Commentariorum*, which is the remaining Latin version, theoretically covering books 18–25 (Mt 22:34–27:66), though it diverges from the prior system of book divisions. Additionally, an appendix at the end of volume one offers fragments of the *Commentary* outside of his translation of Matthew 13:36–27:66. About five pages of this appendix are quotations from fourth-century authors while about thirty-six pages are so-called catena fragments. Catena biblical commentaries strung quotations together from various church fathers on a given book with marginal notes identifying the authors (319). Heine translated only those catena fragments that were attributed to Origen alone, omitting those attributed both to Origen and other authors (320). Unlike some volumes in the Oxford Early Christian Texts series, these include only the English translation (based on the Klostermann and Benz edition) and not any Greek or Latin on the opposite page

(29). To put it all briefly, this translation includes a continuous commentary on Matthew 13:36–27:66 with about forty pages of scattered fragments from the remainder of the Gospel.

Heine’s introduction to the *Commentary on Matthew* does an excellent job orienting the reader to the contours of Origen’s exegetical thought. Spiritual or figurative interpretations, the most easily mischaracterized element of his exegetical thought, are charitably clarified and contextualized. At the same time, Heine draws attention to the continual focus on “comparing Scripture with Scripture” as “the method Origen most often mentions in his interpretations of Scripture as he either practices it himself or instructs his readers to do so” (14–15). He likewise outlines Origen’s differentiation between the crowds and disciples throughout the commentary. For example, the disciples hear the deeper explanations to parables kept back from the crowds. This distinction was not intended to promote an elitism but rather a concern to help others hear what will help them at their level (11). Accordingly, when Peter thought it was “good” to remain on the mount of transfiguration, “Jesus did not do what Peter considered good. Therefore he descended ‘the mountain’ to those incapable of ascending it and seeing his transformation, so that they might behold him in whatever way they were capable of seeing” (11, 124). Lastly his introduction gives extra attention to the chronology of Origen’s *Commentary on Matthew*, especially

because of the recently discovered *New Psalm Homilies*. He advocates that the *New Psalm Homilies* were written late in his life at the time of *Contra Celsum* while the *Commentary on Matthew* is decidedly after *Contra Celsum* (26–27). Consequently, readers should consider possible developments and changes in viewpoint compared to earlier writings such as *On First Principles*.

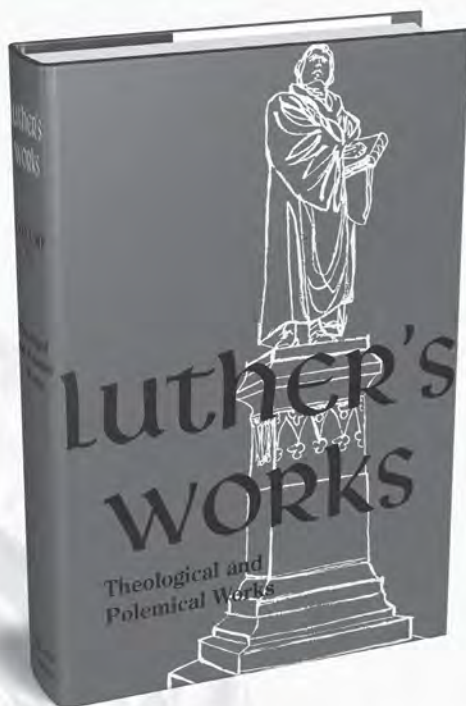
Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, like other writings of early Christians, will appeal to readers for different reasons. Besides offering the earliest preserved commentary on Matthew, the *Commentary* gives numerous glimpses into the early church that will have broad appeal to various disciplines and interests. Regarding the canon, for example, he variously qualifies quotations of disputed books like the Wisdom of Solomon (628), the Shepherd (633), and Susanna (649), even discussing the challenge of "secret writings" in view of 2 Timothy 3:8 (731). Likewise for text critics, Origen likes to note variations between his copies of the Gospel (e.g., 140, 146, 204, 335, 410, 454–455, 734, 741). He also offers some intriguing discussions for Lutherans, such as "the paradox of saying that someone is both perfect and, at the same time, a sinner" (207). Additionally, in the account of Peter's confession, Origen refuses to take Jesus's statement about building the church on the rock as applying specifically to Peter alone, instead referring it to all who imitate Christ (99). One of the more rewarding parts of reading

early Christian writings is finding such unexpected discussions and directions.

Heine's monumental project has brought far greater accessibility for Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* with his translation that strives for approachability alongside a concern for technical terms. The cost will make it a niche product specifically for those interested in Origen, early Christianity, or the history of exegesis. For such an audience, though, Heine's work is of high quality and easily recommendable.

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