

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

Summer 2016  
volume 42 | number 3



Diversity and Unity in a Multicultural Church:  
God's Dream for the Twenty-first Century

Unity and Diversity:  
Being a Multicultural Church

Theology for Culture:  
Confrontation, Context, and Creation

Hispanic Is Not What You Think:  
Reimagining Hispanic Identity

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

(ISSN 0145-7233)

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

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

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The *Concordia Journal* (ISSN 0145-7233) is published quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall). The annual subscription rate is \$25 (individuals) and \$75 (institutions) payable to Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105. New subscriptions and renewals also available at <http://store.csl.edu>. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Concordia Journal*, Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105-3199.

*On the cover: Detail from Wanderer above the Sea of Fog by Casper David Friedrich (1818). In a footnote to his article, Robert Rosin sees this work by the German Romanticist as a touchstone for the work of history: "Is the wanderer looking back to reflect on where he has been, or is he peering forward to reconnoiter what seems to lie ahead? Could be both: history is Janus-like, looking both ways . . ."*

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

## CONTENTS

### EDITORIALS

- 181 Editor's Note
- 182 "With Confidence and Cheerful Courage,  
Offering Help Where Help Is Needed"  
Dale A. Meyer
- 185 Encomia for Robert Rosin  
Paul Robinson, Erik Herrmann and  
Gerald Bode

### ARTICLES

- 193 Diversity and Unity in a Multicultural Church:  
God's Dream for the Twenty-first Century  
Laokouxang (Kou) Seying
- 203 Unity and Diversity: Being a Multicultural Church  
Mason Keiji Okubo
- 211 Theology for Culture: Confrontation, Context,  
and Creation  
William W. Schumacher
- 223 Hispanic Is Not What You Think:  
Reimagining Hispanic Identity, Implications  
for an Increasingly Global Church  
Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.
- 239 HOMILETICAL HELPS
- 263 BOOK REVIEWS



# EDITORIALS

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For the first time ever, this issue of *Concordia Journal* collects together essays from Concordia Seminary's most recent Multiethnic Symposium (January 26–27, 2016). In addition, we have posted video of Leo Sánchez's Annual Lecture in Hispanic/Latino Theology and Mission, which occurred during the Symposium, at [www.concordiatheology.org](http://www.concordiatheology.org). As we continue in this post-Ferguson, post-Dallas summer of our discontent, the timing could not be better.

The significance is doubled by the shift that has occurred in the Multiethnic Symposium's own history (which Andy Bartelt speaks to in two posts at [www.concordiatheology.org](http://www.concordiatheology.org)). The event began as an effort to increase "cross-cultural ministry" in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and that effort initially played out as attempts to answer the question of how we bring ethnic minorities through our doors. Notice, though, how that posture maintains Anglo identity as the dominant culture. The shift has been to open the floor for ethnic minorities to speak for themselves, and to examine how our own cultural presuppositions keep our doors closed to others even as we thought we had opened them up (the smell of last week's sauerkraut from the church basement notwithstanding).

It is still popular to mention the commonplace cliché that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. And it is still true. The fact remains that The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is one of the most demographically "white" denominations in America, with the demographic gap ever widening. Can we narrow the gap?

The critical moral issues aside, pitting the church against the culture is often the easy way out. It keeps our hands clean. But it raises the question of whose culture we are presumably "against." Much harder is the messy work of engaging the other who is right under our nose, in our neighborhood, standing in our grocery lines. The theologian Miroslav Volf, who also lectured on our campus this past spring, underscores that these "concrete encounters with the other" can only happen when our attempt to understand the other is "addressed as a question."<sup>1</sup> Only when we are willing to hear their answers, on their own terms, can we begin to see things from their side of the table. The beautiful thing is, if we genuinely listen, our curiosity will usually be reciprocated. Then the really good conversations begin.

Pulling up a seat at the table with the voices within these pages is as good a place to start as any. May you and I, fellow reader, be counted among those who have ears to hear.

Travis J. Scholl  
Managing Editor of Theological Publications

<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 144.

## “With Confidence and Cheerful Courage, Offering Help Where Help Is Needed”

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I regularly tell our students that it's a great time to enter the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's not the conventional wisdom: American culture is no longer pro-church, many congregations are struggling in one way or another, and we see statistical decline in our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. What we're missing in many of our hand-wringing discussions is confidence in the Lord of the church. Sociology rather than theology is determining the script for many of our current conversations. Yes indeed, there are stiff challenges but this is a great time to be in the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. C. F. W. Walther told seminarians, “I wish to talk the Christian doctrine into your very heart, enabling you to come forward as living witnesses with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. I do not want you to be standing in your pulpits like lifeless statues, but to speak with confidence and cheerful courage, offering help where help is needed.”<sup>1</sup> Are we not presuming to sit in judgment over the power of the Spirit when we imagine this is a bad time to be in the Lord's mission?

Polls regularly show that most Americans believe our country is headed in the wrong direction. The phenomenon of Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, and populist anger against Washington is proof that we're not in the 1950s anymore. That's exactly the point of *The Fractured Republic* by Yuval Levin.<sup>2</sup> The years after World War II were a time of consolidation in the United States. America had come through the Great Depression and the war as a united people. The economy was booming with little competition, Europe and Japan lying in ruins. After the Korean War there was relative peace, a “cold” war, not hot. Institutional Christianity was the moral center and ethical guide for America. That's a bit rosy, and Levin points out that the seeds of future troubles were already present in those post-war years, but today many Americans look back selectively to that “better” time. Levin says nostalgia blinds Americans on the political Left and Right to the possibilities and solutions to our current problems. “The nostalgia therefore makes it difficult not only to see a path out of our economic and social challenges but also to see a way past our divisions and to recover some genuine unity amid our raucous, fractured diversity.”<sup>3</sup>

Set in this American context, it's no wonder that we look back with nostalgia to the LCMS many of us experienced in our youth. While church historians can take us through the entire history of our Synod, most of the voices heard in the church today are speaking from personal experiences with the Synod soon after World War II. Those were God-blessed times, no doubt about it. Great churches were built, Lutheran schools were growing, memberships grew, seminaries were full, the church was a respected institution and mainline denominations provided a moral center for American life. That has all changed in ways we can't fully understand. Like many Americans, we're tempted to the default position of nostalgia but de-Spirited looking back robs us of “confidence and cheerful courage” in the dynamism of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for our twenty-



first-century mission. “Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this” (Eccl 7:10).<sup>4</sup>

Talking about the country and not the church, Levin shows that two polar opposites already present in the post-war era, hyper-individualism and centralization of power, have grown to dominate our public life today. In contradictory ways, Americans, fevered individualists that we are, are ceding more and more authority to the centralization of power in the federal government and to a concentration of economic power in giant corporations. This centralization and concentration has developed even as American individualism seems to have gone on steroids. The country is pulling apart because we’re going in two different directions at one and the same time. The result has been the hollowing out of America’s center and the weakening of mediating institutions, like family and church. Family is more about “me” than “we,” and I don’t need to go to places like church where I meet people (and a message) that don’t flatter me. I can prefer to associate with people exactly like myself, my affinity group, my Facebook friends, my tribe. That’s hyper-individualism taking us to extremes of decentralization, all the while we’re looking more and more to centralized power in government to solve our problems and bring us together. The Left is nostalgic for the 1960s, increased government programs, civil rights, the Great Society, and the Right is nostalgic for the Reagan years with deregulation, American exceptionalism, and the triumph of liberty over communism. Left and Right, each believing it has the key to America’s future and that the other side is wrong and dangerous, are doubling down in their efforts and attacks on the opposition. No middle ground seems to be left, no place where individualism is reconciled with our obligations to other citizens. No wonder Trump and Sanders emerged! “As a centralizing government draws power out of the mediating institutions of society, it leaves individuals more isolated; and as individualism further erodes the bonds that hold civil society together, people conclude that only a central authority can pick up the slack.”<sup>5</sup>

Levin’s way forward is to acknowledge that the 1950s were indeed a special time but they’re gone. We can learn what worked then and apply it to America’s current dysfunction. Levin says solutions “would seek to treat the excesses of individualism not through greater centralization of our institutions, but through greater **decentralization** of them, and to mitigate both over-consolidation and hyper-individualism **by revitalizing the mediating layers of society**.”<sup>6</sup> Here is an opportunity for our congregations to act as vital centers for bringing God’s love to our neighborhoods and communities. Even with the various struggles congregations have in this post-churched time, congregations are today mediating institutions between individualism and obligations to others. “The ultimate soul-forming institutions in a free society are frequently religious institutions. Traditional religion offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the age of fracture. Religious commitments command us to a mixture of responsibility, sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free.”<sup>7</sup> The tension between the extremes of hyper-individualism and necessary obligation to others is mediated in the local church as we see ourselves as individual members of the collective body of Christ. Other entities in the church, its national structures and leaders should be the background, servants to congregations, “helpers of

joy” to people.<sup>8</sup> The congregation as a mediating institution is a present reality to be celebrated and affirmed every time the people gather and an incentive to a greater passion for outreach. “May we, where help is needed, there give help as unto Thee!”<sup>9</sup>

Concordia Seminary is congregationally focused, not only because of the congregation’s role as a mediating institution for the betterment of society but most especially because the mission of God in Jesus Christ comes to us in congregations and goes forth from congregations for the salvation of souls. Three of the Seminary’s four strategic priorities focus on the congregation.

- “Leading with the Gospel, Concordia Seminary will prepare pastors who shepherd congregations that bear witness to the Gospel within their communities.
- “Leading with the Gospel, Concordia Seminary will provide resources that foster lifelong maturation of faith, discipleship and skill both in pastors and laity within their congregations.
- “Leading with the Gospel, Concordia Seminary will connect its formational work directly with the realities of congregational ministry today.”

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is becoming smaller and smaller and the symptoms of our decline can be found in many corners of the church. Are we victims of changed demographics, the shift to a post-churched culture in America, a lack of mission passion, or something else? One writer has observed that every five-hundred years the church has a garage sale.<sup>10</sup> Maybe that’s what’s happening now, God refining his church. The church is being called back to the essence of its being and mission. Ecclesiastes said it is not from wisdom that we imagine the past was better. “Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God,” as true for the church today as in the first century (1 Cor1:24). “Anything that savors of dejection spiritually is always wrong.”<sup>11</sup> It’s a great time to be church, “with confidence and cheerful courage, offering help where help is needed.”

Dale A. Meyer  
President

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America’s Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Barton Swain in a review of *The Fractured Republic*. Wall Street Journal, May 24, 2016; A9.

<sup>5</sup> Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 186.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 187–188. Bold-faced emphases mine.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:24, KJV.

<sup>9</sup> *Lutheran Service Book*, 853 v 5.

<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Oswald Chamber, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1935) February 7.

*On May 19, 2016, the campus community of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, celebrated the retirement of Robert Rosin as the Eugene E. and Nell S. Fincke Graduate Professor of Theology, as well as the retirement from Concordia Publishing House of his wife, Laine. Three of his colleagues in the department of historical theology celebrated Bob and Laine with the encomia below.*

### **Paul Robinson, Professor of Historical Theology and Dean of the Faculty**

I'm happy to be here today to celebrate Professor Rosin. He has been an outstanding teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend. But more serious stuff later. Let's start instead with two fun facts related to Bob Rosin.

- Bob has more books in just his seminary office than the University of Paris library had during the Middle Ages.
- Laine Rosin makes a fabulous chicken tortilla casserole.

Believe it or not, these two facts are related. Nobody who knows Bob will be surprised that he has a lot of books. But the reason I know that he has more books in his office than the medieval university of Paris had in its library has to do with Bob as a teacher. You see, we had run across the number of books that the Paris library had, but wondered what that looked like. So Bob made a rough count of the books in his office. The reason was to give students a point of comparison—to show how small a number of books the Paris library actually had, though the exact number was in the thousands.

The second fact—Laine's chicken tortilla casserole—also has to do with Bob's approach to teaching. When I was a student, he would routinely host graduate seminars at his home in the evening. After the discussion, there were always goodies to eat and drink. As a poor, single graduate student, this often served as my evening meal. One night, after I had shown a particular appetite for the chicken tortilla casserole, Laine sent the leftovers home with me. I have never forgotten that, and it is just one example of what generous hosts Bob and Laine are in any number of situations.

Now to the more serious side. After two fun facts, two quotes:

- "We are dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants."
- "When it comes to theology, a certain modesty is required."

"We are dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants" was written by Bernard of Chartres. His point was that he, a twelfth-century scholar, was reliant on and indebted to those who had come before him. I first discovered this quote in one of the readings for a seminar class with Bob, and I chose to use it today because he enjoys joking about my chosen field of medieval history, mostly by referring to the Middle Ages as "a thousand years without a bath." But it's also appropriate to Bob's approach to teaching. He always made us feel that we were in the middle of a great conversation with other scholars past and present and frequently displayed his own indebtedness to his teachers and mentors.

The second quote, “When it comes to theology, a certain modesty is required,” is from Martin Luther. I would hesitate to pronounce on what Bob’s favorite Luther quote is, but he refers to this one quite often. The sort of intellectual humility that Luther means is a trait cultivated by teachers of critical thinking. Seeing things from other people’s points of view, walking in their shoes, is critical to doing theology well. Bob has taught this trait of intellectual humility by word and action throughout his service here at Concordia Seminary. He is relentlessly humble—even with us, his colleagues, and even when he seems able to see much farther than the rest of us dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants.

### **Erik Herrmann, Associate Professor of Historical Theology**

Professor Rosin’s retirement was announced to me as part of a subordinate clause in a phone call a few weeks ago. He said, “Since I’m retiring at the end of the year, we should talk about next year’s course schedule . . .” It should therefore come as no surprise that he is not terribly pleased that we are making such a fuss. I think he would agree with the humorist Josh Billings (1818–1885) that encomia should be regarded as *cologne*—a little dab of it is fine but in no wise should it be ingested internally.

So in keeping with this, I will keep this laconic and light, but also because encomium are not always the best context to say what one wants to say or even to say what one should.

And so now if you permit me, I will list in bullet point fashion a few of the “important lessons I learned from Professor Robert Rosin”:

- He taught me “how to read a book” encompassing everything that Mortimer Adler prescribed with the addition of *doing it all while walking*. Why use time that could be used to read and learn something in favor of paying attention to where you are going (the bumps and bruises will heal . . . though the pansies in Mrs. Meyer’s flower bed will not recover)?
- Take notes on everything . . . except bad books. Don’t even bother finishing them.
- There is always more than one way to skin a cat . . . this is not a metaphor.
- Sleep is a design flaw.
- There were seven different kinds of sump pumps in the sixteenth century. Don’t believe me?—It’s in Georg Agricola’s 1556 book on mining and smelting, *De Re Metallica*. If you don’t want to slog through the Latin, you can always read the English translation by Herbert Hoover . . . yes, *that* Herbert Hoover.
- *Ohne Humanismus, keine Reformation*—No Humanism, no Reformation. You could dispute this if you want, but you are probably wrong.

But to strike a more serious note, the list of what I learned from Dr. Rosin is of course much longer than what I can relate here, but I should mention two rather significant lessons. First, *we are always to be students*. No matter how much one has studied and read, there is always something new to learn, someone new to listen to, some new

twist, insight, approach. Martin Luther spoke of books as “our speechless masters” and Bob famously listens to more of these masters than many of us. But people are interesting too, and knowledge and learning happens in conversation with others. Bob is not just interested in old things; he is interested in important, meaningful things, past and present. What Henri Pirenne (1862–1935), the famous French medievalist, once said of himself could easily be applied to Bob as well: “If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for the old stuff, but I am an historian. Therefore, I love life.”<sup>1</sup>

The second item that I learned from Bob is *what it means to be a teacher*. Not that I have arrived or even achieved that much in this regard, but if one were to imitate him, you would quickly find that Bob excels in two key areas. First there is one of his favorite quotes: “*La bibliographie est le vestibule de la science*”—“Bibliography is the vestibule of knowledge.” But as his many doctoral students can attest, Bob himself is a walking bibliography and endless resource—there was always one more name, one more book (a thin one with a blue jacket cover—he memorizes books by color as well as by title and author). He thus became a vestibule for us, a gateway into understanding our field, what kind of questions we should ask, and where we might look to find the answers.

Second, if one were to imitate Bob, you would also find that being a teacher means *living for your students*. Bob was enormously sacrificial with his time and attention to his students. It is an indisputable fact that Bob had more important things to do than meet with me . . . but for some reason he never thought so. And as Paul already mentioned, this graciousness and hospitality with time was as much Laine’s gift to us as it was Bob’s. Professor Rosin studied under another great educator, Lewis Spitz of Stanford University. Like Bob, Professor Spitz was known for his selfless support and encouragement of his students. At the end of his career, Spitz reflected on what made it all worthwhile. His words are a fitting exemplar of what Bob so clearly embodied (and so I will close with these):

Teaching has always seemed to me to be a most important and honorable vocation, both a healing and an invigorating cultural exchange between mentor and students. As for me . . . teaching has enabled me to develop a career that coincides perfectly with my inner needs and goals in life, which have more to do with service than with ambition, more with love of people than with a wish to dominate, more with mind and spirit than with material things.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historians Craft* (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 1954): 36.

## Gerhard Bode, Associate Professor of Historical Theology and Dean of Advanced Studies

My life changed in the winter quarter of my first year at Concordia Seminary when I enrolled in Dr. Rosin’s H130—The Lutheran Reformation course. It was a turning point. There are many reasons why this experience was important. First,

that class sparked in me a keen interest in history and in Luther's theology. The content was incredibly rich and has informed so much of my own understanding of the Reformation and of my own teaching. In that class, and in so many others, Dr. Rosin taught us how Luther understood the gospel. More than that was the way that he taught. It was his style that I appreciated so much. He didn't lecture, he didn't talk at his students. This was a conversation about really important ideas, about history and theology, and what they are for us and for the church today.

In preparing for today, I looked back at the papers that I wrote for that first class with Dr. Rosin. The first thing that struck me—although it was not surprising—was that they were all marked up. He had made editorial corrections (using proofreaders' marks), but then he had written comments all over in the margins. When I read them again I realized that he was engaging in a conversation with me about what I had written. He was helping me learn, expanding my thinking, pulling me into ideas beyond what I expressed in my writing. What he was doing in that class was never about him, it was always about ideas and about helping his students. That impressed me, but more than that, it encouraged me to do the same.

Fast forward through many years and many courses and Dr. Rosin was my doctoral advisor. For this I always will be immensely grateful. I could not have asked for a better advisor. And he kept me at the task. When I would come into his office and announce that I was thinking about chucking the whole thing and running off to join the circus or the French Foreign Legion or something worse, he would tell me to get back to work and that he expected chapter 3 on his desk on Monday morning. He encouraged me to persevere. His patience, longsuffering, and selflessness are admirable and have been much appreciated.

Bob's extensive written work deserves attention. He has a great article in the 2016 Winter *Concordia Journal*. His *Lutheran Witness* articles are some of my favorites. He can teach the most challenging PhD courses in the Graduate School, deal with the most difficult philosophical and theological concepts, and then write an article for the *Witness* that is as clear as can be and always rings true. He is a great writer, a great communicator.

### **Fun Facts about Bob**

The only person I know who was admitted to the PhD program at Harvard—and chose not to matriculate.

The only person I know who withdrew from the PhD program at Stanford (he's a Stanford dropout). Then after a hiatus, he was reinstated into the program, had his dissertation proposal, and the dissertation itself approved—all on the same day.

### **Great Quote from Bob**

"You didn't get the concept; here's some bibliography to deal with."

When I became a graduate student and would run into him on the sidewalk, he would ask, "Why aren't you reading a book?" Even today, I can't leave my office to walk across campus without asking myself, "Is there a chance I might run into Bob? Perhaps I should bring a book . . ."

## **Bob's Service to Concordia Seminary**

He has taught at Concordia Seminary for thirty-five years, which is a good start; he has taught since 1981. He has served as professor in the department of historical theology during that time, and was its chairman for a number of years.

Some remember that he ran the library for several years. He served as faculty marshal for many years. For ten years he was the editor of Concordia Seminary Publications, which produced a whole series of great books and collections of essays. He was also for at least fifteen years the director of the Center for Reformation Research.

In his service to the Seminary and to the Synod he has taught all over the world: Papua New Guinea, Brazil, England, Ethiopia (Bob taught in Ethiopia long before it became the latest craze, he has always been far ahead), and all over Eurasia, in and out of the various 'stans. It was always good to have Laine send out news about Bob in Bishkek. For many years Bob served as the theological education coordinator for Eurasia for LCMS World Mission and the Office of International Mission. His service there, too, has been very important for our international partners.

Thank you for the fine Christian example you set for us. For the example as a scholar, a teacher, a colleague, as a churchman.

Laine is retiring, too, from Concordia Publishing House where she has served as an editor for many years. Thank you, Laine, for your service to the Seminary and its students . . . your participation in the life of the Seminary for so many years.

Thank you, both of you, for gracious hospitality in your home. There are so many things that we could say, so many things we must leave for another time. But I am confident that I speak for all of us when I say: Laine and Bob, thank you for being such a wonderful part of our lives. We love you.

Thank you for being so good to the students. For the kindness, generosity, and love that you have shown to us. Bob, thank you for being our teacher and our colleague. For all our days it will be our great privilege to say: Bob Rosin was my teacher.





# ARTICLES

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## Diversity and Unity in a Multicultural Church God's Dream for the Twenty-first Century

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Laokouxang (Kou) Seying

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord has called us to be in this time and place for the purpose of his mission and it is unlike any other time in the history of the mission of God. What a wonderful opportunity for the church to embrace meaningfully what it means to be a diverse and united multicultural church.<sup>1</sup>

Many immigrants/refugees came to America for the “American dream” as the result of wars, political conflicts, or opportunities that arose. America is always the number one choice simply because of that “dream.” But the American dream has never been what it promised to be even if one has achieved all the worldly gains that America could provide—education, prosperity and success, security, and upward social mobility achieved through hard work in a society with few barriers, greater opportunities, and so on.

Many of us came for these various reasons. For some of us HMong people, by the grace of God, we have discovered that we did not come to America for the American dream, but we actually came here for God's dream, God's purpose!

In one sense, the struggle today for diversity and unity remains the same as throughout the history of God's people. In the Old Testament the people of God had to deal with the notion of Israel and the nations. What does it mean to be a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, and to rescue those that are in darkness? These were recurring themes in the Old Testament period. In the New Testament the shift was from Jews to Gentiles (the nations). What does it mean to include other nations, the Gentiles? For the historic Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), it was the Germans and the non-Germans. What does it mean to embrace other Europeans in this new land? Today, the discussion involves Whites and the non-Hispanic Whites. What does diversity and unity mean in a multicultural landscape? I am sure in the years to come there will be other categories that we must deal with too. But we shall not worry about that concern now.

Some sociologists would say that America has two primary indigenous cultures—Black and White.<sup>2</sup> The rest fall somewhere in between. For the church such as the LCMS, there has been only one primary monoculture—White (German) for the most

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part. Historically speaking, those of us from the outside either assimilate (give up our identity) or go somewhere else.

Recognizing these realities, the church has attempted various models of ministry over the years from assimilation, satellite, multicultural ministries that function separately but under one roof or synod, and some integrated ministries as tokens. These various models resulted in even more segregated congregations and ministries. In many ways, the church continues to be the most segregated place in America despite the “success” of the civil rights movement. On the national level of all Christendom in America, only about 7.5 percent<sup>3</sup> of the congregations are considered multiracial.<sup>4</sup> “Multiracial” is defined using the 80-20 standard, “no single racial or cultural (ethnic) group is more than 80 percent of the membership. In other words, at least 20 percent of the members are not part of the dominant group.”<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, there are many dynamics happening at the same time in the church, the LCMS in particular, that require some serious attention. The problem is that these issues are not easy to discuss; they push us outside of our comfort zone. Cognitively, the church, at least the LCMS, understands what the church is and has taught members what it means to be the church philosophically.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the church has not embraced what it means to be the church existentially to reflect the communities of the land—we are not the church of Antioch, as we ought to be in light of the American population today. Therefore, the gap between our cognitive and existential understanding of the church is tremendously wide.

Watching the dynamics of my own extended family as various members enter into interracial marriages and raise their families in that context is quite interesting to say the least. I have a brother who married an Anglo<sup>7</sup> lady, his college sweetheart—as LCMS German as they come. I have two sisters who married Anglo men outside of the LCMS and they bring their own unique sets of worldviews. I have two cousins who married African American men that have overcome some intense prejudices within the HMong community and probably elsewhere too. Some cousins married within Asian groups but not HMong; they have their own unique contributions as well. And of course, those of us that married within our own ethnic group, HMong, are experiencing all the unique joys and challenges as well in this context of discussion.

In light of this very diverse context of family, how do we remain “one family” and yet at the same time embrace the incredible diversity within the family? Just because my family has become so diverse, it still remains my family against all ethnocentrism at times. This is a good analogous question for the church today.

On the church and ministry side of things, my family has had forty years of experience being LCMS members since our days of being “fresh off the boat” when we were sponsored by an LCMS congregation to the subsequent years of life and ministry in the church. Some tough questions need to be asked here as well. How was it that we were embraced so warmly as part of the church family, and yet the church could not embrace the diversity that existed in her community? What caused some family members to drift from the church and some to embrace the ministry of the church? Did the church play a role one way or another, negatively or positively? Or is it purely a

personal walk that dictates the course of one's life? The answers may not be as simple as one might think.

My years of ministry in the church—parish, district, and higher education—wrestling with such issues as proposed for this symposium have contributed immensely to who “Kou” is today. The failures and the successes in ministry have brought such richness that will require years to unpack. Again, how does one's journey in life and ministry impact the future of the church one way or another?

Bethlehem in St. Paul, Minnesota is one for some thoughts. In 2000, while I was a faculty member of Concordia University in St. Paul, we began a HMong ministry there. It became quite “successful” as a segregated HMong ministry under the auspices of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church. We were members of Bethlehem but worshiped separately in the HMong language. I was the assisting pastor (vs. assistant) of Bethlehem. Essentially, we had our own word and sacrament ministry apart from Bethlehem but under the so-called one congregation. When I accepted the call to serve in California, the HMong worship attendance was averaging 125 per Sunday. It was a “success” by any LCMS mission standard. What I did not anticipate was what happened in the years that followed my departure. After a few years, HMong ministry began to decline. It deteriorated to the point of no HMong ministry today. There are still HMong members there, but it no longer has a HMong ministry as we had defined before.

However, there were some dynamics that call for some attention. In those years of the HMong ministry struggling, many stepped up into leadership positions. Two consecutive presidents of this overwhelmingly White/German majority congregation were HMong business/professional men. The Sunday school superintendent was a HMong lady. The chairperson of the board of the congregation's school, Joy Academy, was also a HMong lady who eventually was elected to the Board of Regents of Concordia Seminary in Ft. Wayne (no longer serving) by the national convention. One of the former congregational presidents was elected to the Board of Regents of Concordia University, St. Paul, and is presently serving his first term. The other former president of the congregation transferred to an LCMS HMong congregation and continues to thrive in a leadership role. And there were other key positions held by HMong members as well.

For various reasons, they were not able to call a HMong pastor, and so they called a Korean pastor as the associate pastor to serve the HMong ministry and outreach into the community with the hope of planting HMong ministries/churches in the surrounding suburban towns of St. Paul to the east especially. This effort was supported in part by the Minnesota South (MNS) District. Long story short, the Korean pastor was called and accepted as the senior/sole pastor of Bethlehem located in the heart of a very diverse neighborhood of the eastside St. Paul, Minnesota.

The pastor and many leaders had always credited the years of HMong ministry and its HMong pastor there for opening the door for him to become the pastor of Bethlehem. But it is really God's doing through his people and servants. The call committee recommended five candidates for the voters to choose, of which four were

White/Anglo. The congregation chose the Korean pastor over the Anglo. Twenty-nine or thirty pastors showed up at the installation service to give words of encouragement to him. The district president simply said, "I have never seen this many pastors in an installation service before."

Is this the beginning of a new trend in the LCMS becoming "one body in Christ" or simply an isolated situation that was forced into a new reality? Only time will tell. However, this situation set a precedence unlike any other time or place in LCMS history.

Peace Lutheran Church in Fresno, California is one good example of how we can embrace diversity and unity in a multicultural church. The congregation has committed to cross-cultural ministry reaching out to California's highest concentration of HMong communities. The 2010 US Census reports over thirty thousand HMongs living in the Fresno metropolitan area.

The congregation is integrated in all areas of ministry, yet it serves the two primary language groups individually. There is a weekly service in the HMong language and there is a weekly service in English. HMong members hold elected offices in the leadership council and elders. Youth and children ministries are integrated. The congregation has called and hired staff who are fluent in both languages and cultures. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League is very well integrated with HMong and Anglo ladies. Servant and community events are well attended by the diverse congregation.

How has embracing diversity and unity affected the congregation? First and foremost, it has rejuvenated the faith of the congregation. The senior pastor said to me one day, "Kou, HMong ministry has revitalized my faith." Prior to HMong ministry there, the brothers in the circuit had recommended he take a sabbatical for the sake of his health.

As the result of embracing diversity and unity, the congregation has sent students to be pastors and now several potential deaconess students are included in the mix. Dr. John Loum received an application already and more to come after the first HMong Symposium (January 2016) and not just from Fresno.

Our very own MDiv student from Peace Fresno congregation in his concluding year is Chou Vang. And we have another three men who concluded the MDiv program this spring as well: Doua Xiong from the North Wisconsin District, Richard Her from the Florida-Georgia District, and Daniel Vang from the South Wisconsin District. What is unique about Daniel is that he will be a second-generation HMong pastor. His father, Yia, graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1993.

So, the HMongs are here to stay as LCMS Lutherans.

By embracing diversity and unity in a multicultural church, does this mean that all the problems of the congregation have gone away? The answer is no, not at all. If anything, the problems of the church may have just increased. It may very well bring in a new set of problems. For example, the church is overrun now with noisy children everywhere. Things are broken around the church; walls are scratched and scribbled upon because of the many young children. Hymnals are torn in the pews. The worse thing that could happen to a German congregation's kitchen is the smell of sauer-

kraut. Now imagine the smell of fish sauce or shrimp paste. Do you know what fish sauce is? Rotten fish juice (!) that many of us Asians cannot do without in many of our Southeast Asian dishes.

Beyond these earthly things, now all of a sudden, the congregation is faced with new theological questions. What is syncretism? What does it mean that you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons at the same time? What are you going to do with demon possession? How do we usher people into the faith that have different religious backgrounds? How long should we catechize people? Ten weeks, ten months? What is the length of time that is necessary to properly instruct new Christians in the faith? What do we do with a former shaman who cannot quit talking about his faith and the gospel, which is the power unto his salvation?

“The church will always be in a state of crisis” is a part of a statement formulated by the International Missionary Council in preparation for its 1938 Tambaram conference.<sup>8</sup> This is a true statement for today as well. Especially in the mission of God, things will always be messy. New questions and tensions will arise as the result of new ministries, and new people in the church. But what does it mean to be in the “normal” state of crisis?

One of the Anglo elders confessed to me several times saying that when we first approached Peace Lutheran Church to consider HMong ministry, he thought to himself, “Man, we can teach these folks a lot of things.” Now he simply said, “Boy, was I wrong! These folks (referring to the HMongs) can teach us so much about our faith and life.”

### **A Synopsis of LCMS HMong Ministry (as of January 2016)**

1. LCMS congregations began HMong ministry in 1976 through the refugee sponsorship program of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.
2. HMong Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Paul, the first chartered HMong congregation in the LCMS, was officially received into membership of the Minnesota-South District on September 18, 1988.
3. Rev. Kou Seying became the first HMong ordained pastor in the LCMS on July 7, 1991.
4. There are 20 Word and Sacrament ministries today with:
  - Approximately 1500 members<sup>9</sup>
  - 47 percent average attendance.
5. There are twenty-one ordained HMong pastors in the LCMS:
  - 3 MDiv
  - 1 Special Colloquy (CTS Experimental Program 1994)
  - 3 DELTO
  - 14 EIIT
  - 3 Inactive
6. Four MDiv students graduated this spring (2016) from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

7. Two EIIT vicars, one in his concluding year.
8. Three commissioned deacons: two serving in the California-Nevada-Hawaii District and the other in the Northwest District.
9. LCMS resources in the HMong language:
  - Hymnal
  - A Child's Garden of Bible Stories
  - Luther's Small Catechism (Enchiridion)
  - Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (in final stages)
  - The Book of Concord (in progress)
10. This year (2016) marks the fortieth anniversary of LCMS ministry to the HMong people in America!

Our vicarage office tells us that the HMong and Sudanese ministries combined are larger than one of our districts. Certainly, LCMS HMong ministry alone is larger than some of our partner churches overseas. So the possibility to be diverse and united in one confession is possible.

As my family and I crisscrossed this country, visiting urban and cross-cultural ministries, we saw so many opportunities across our Synod. Whether we are talking about the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles, Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, or Atlanta, and on and on across America, the mission opportunities are great.

For diversity and unity in a multicultural church to be a reality, we must look beyond the challenges to see its beauty! It is not our dream; it's God's dream and his ultimate doxological purpose in missions.

There are some real challenges for sure. We cannot ignore them. Let us consider some of the issues.

In this symposium, we question the quietism of the church in moving toward a multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic church.<sup>10</sup> Pew Research tells us that we (LCMS) are one of the least diverse church bodies in America. We rank third with a 95 percent non-Hispanic White population.<sup>11</sup> We do not acknowledge it very well. We do not even know how many ethnic pastors we have in the church and where they are serving and how their ministries are doing. What joys and what challenges do they experience? Would anyone even care if a non-Anglo pastor just disappeared from the church? These are challenging and uncomfortable questions. Many church leaders from the multiethnic immigrant population feel very isolated from the church even though they are doing ministry in and for the church.

Some challenges that have not been addressed sufficiently are related to racism, including institutional racism, in the church. The visible church as a part of the sinful human nature will not eradicate racism all together. However, when the minority members of the church (including non-Anglo pastors) feel a strong presence of racism, it impacts the church as a whole. To complicate matters more, institutional racism exists whether one is aware of it or not. Intentional or unintentional, it exists in both public and private institutions. There have been some strides in remedying this in public institutions by increasing the level of contact between races and by advocating equal access.



However, “little change has occurred in the private institutions.”<sup>12</sup> This is especially so in the church.

Strong ethnocentrism in ministries across all the ethnic groups including the dominant group of the church is also impacting the church and its mission in the attempt to be diverse and united in a multicultural church. The homogenous unit principle of church growth in the last century has not helped the diversity and unity of the church either as articulated by Soong-Chan Rah: “The homogenous unit principle allowed the white church to further propagate a system of white privilege by creating a system of de facto segregation. Segregation justified by a desire for church growth allows white churches to remain separate.”<sup>13</sup>

Whether one agrees with Rah or not, the fact remains that very little has changed in the private institutions. This includes the church, and such a principle of church growth has not been helpful on either side of the discussion in both white and non-white congregations. What does it mean to have an integrated ministry embracing the “one body in Christ” and yet at the same time allowing some healthy segregation necessitated by unique circumstances?<sup>14</sup>

The void of multiethnic leadership in the church has contributed to the lack of intentional mission outreach to a diverse population of America. The church has the opportunity through its theological education to properly equip multiethnic leaders to the highest degree and with the utmost integrity. No one wishes to be a token on any leadership team. The only way to remedy this is for the church to invest in raising up leaders of all ethnic groups through its foundational theological education without compromising. This does not mean that there is no room for innovative theological education. The congregations, the districts, and the seminaries all have unique roles to play in this process. The twenty-first century will bring change in how sound doctrinal theology is brought to the world. Proper equipping of multiethnic leaders will give proper voices to the church.

As leaders are properly identified and equipped, the church can address properly how we become a multiracial church body without compromising our biblical and confessional stand. And how does a congregation avoid being “more cultural in makeup than multicultural in behavior” as is often the case.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the debates in the advocacy for multiracial congregations, for a multiethnic church body, have been centered on theological issues. Some would argue that the church must relax its theological stringent in order to embrace the diversity that reflects its community. How does the LCMS go about this? If we are not careful in this process of multiculturalism, syncretism is a real possibility that the church must avoid. These are pragmatic and biblical/theological issues that will need to be handled soundly from Scripture. What is an authentic multiracial congregation and church? The larger question for us, as a synod, then is what does it mean for the LCMS to become a multiracial synod authentically? Will we know it when we arrive there?

In the purest sense, individual informs family, family informs community, community informs the church, the church informs theological education, and theological education informs the world. The cycle repeats itself. When there are disconnects, the

church and its theological education become irrelevant.

The question then becomes, how do we do this authentically without compromising the gospel as many denominations have? Dr. Jack Dean Kingsbury said to some of us professors when he was here for the celebration of the New Testament chair, which he endowed, “Why did I choose Concordia Seminary? I could have done it somewhere else including where I spent the majority of my teaching ministry. I endowed here because you are still teaching the truth.”<sup>16</sup>

Can the LCMS be “a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mk 11:17)? Is the LCMS willing to return to the New Testament church? What does Jesus need to clear in this temple, called the LCMS, in order to truly embrace “a house of prayer for all the nations”? Can we not equate worship style with cultural preference? In many instances when a church strives to become multiracial, it only means falling prey to social justice and activism. Can the LCMS avoid these traps?

As we move toward embracing the diversity that the Lord has placed before us, these questions need to be entertained: How do we cultivate our rich heritage so that we may adequately interpret the present with the proper view of enriching the future of our Synod? How can we as a church approach this descriptively rather than proscriptively or prescriptively? Some key words to keep in mind in this process: relation, integration, innovation, holistic, and foundation (biblically and confessionally speaking).

In the book, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*, Michael Emerson describes three types of dreams:

1. The American dream of upward mobility [that I alluded to earlier];
2. Martin Luther King’s dream of a beloved community where there is authentic integration and cooperation; and
3. Malcolm X’s bad dream, a nightmare that results from continued misuse of power and domination of some people—in the US context, usually whites—over others.

“A key goal of this book is to closely examine multiracial congregations in the United States by asking, ‘People of which dream?’ The answer appears to be all three.” Some come to multicultural congregations for upward mobility, some for the community, and some for the power.<sup>17</sup>

Well, this does not help us very much for our question of diversity and unity in a multicultural church. It has to be God’s dream, not our dream!

On the other hand, it is important for us to keep in mind that research shows

that it takes more effort, and often comes with more conflict, to have an organization change from uniraical to multiracial than it is to begin multiracial. Perhaps this seems an obvious conclusion, but it is one that is often overlooked, or at the least, is not easily overcome . . . Though there have been increases in the level of contact between races in the public institutions, little change has occurred in the private institutions.<sup>18</sup>

The council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) preserved the unity of the Antioch church and that of the church at large. “The struggle to maintain unity in Antioch reminds us that racial reconciliation and multiracial congregations often come at a cost and with sacrifice.”<sup>19</sup> Will our LCMS, or any church body for that matter, be willing to make this sacrifice?

Gailyn Van Rhee proposes his Mission Helix, an upward spiral, for consideration in his book, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. The spiral begins with Theological reflection, Cultural Analysis, Historical Perspective, and Strategy Formation.<sup>20</sup> We Lutherans are good with theological reflection, we have a wealth of resources for theological reflection due to our rich Reformation heritage. And we are good at analyzing things from a historical perspective. However, since we have been basically a mono-cultural church body, we are not too good on cultural analysis. Therefore, we have little sense of strategy formation since we have not arrived at a clear understanding of what that might mean without compromising our biblical and confessional stand on the missional aspect of the church.

As we approach the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, Reggie McNeal in his book, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, reminds us “the first Reformation was about freeing the church. The new Reformation is about freeing God’s people for the church. . . . The new Reformation is about mission.”<sup>21</sup>

Here at Concordia Seminary, through the Office of Urban and Cross-cultural Ministry, we are seeking ways to refine and improve our cross-cultural certification programs so that it is accessible to all qualified individuals. There will be intentional efforts to recruit multiethnic students for our residential degree programs. And many initiatives will be launched across the seminary in partnership with the church to help us become more diverse and united in a multicultural church.<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, I offer these thoughts:

Diversity and unity in a multicultural church begins with the definition of what it means to be biblical, and therefore, Lutheran. Before we can talk about what it means to be, or how we can become a multicultural church, we return first to what it means to be a biblical Christian through our basic articles of faith that we confess.

We open up our educational system from pre-kindergarten all the way to seminary level, and one of the best in the world, to all nations. We simply make it happen, make it accessible, to all that wish a Christian education for their children.

We look to our millennial generation for modeling diversity and unity. Our job is to equip them properly with the gospel for they are “America’s most ethnically and racially diverse cohort ever” who look to environments “that authentically *embrace diversity* and inclusion.”<sup>23</sup>

The western American evangelicalism as we know it is coming to an end as reflected by Soong-Chan Rah’s book, *The Next Evangelicalism*. Let us make sure the LCMS embraces the opportunities God places before us so that we may be relevant in the twenty-first century in serving the church and world.

Together, may we celebrate Revelation 7:9, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peo-

ples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”

Together, let us embrace the diversity and unity of our future LCMS multicultural church. Let us look beyond the challenges to see the beauty. It is God’s dream, his ultimate doxological purpose!

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> For greater details of diverse America, see LCMS Mission Field USA Infographic 2016. <https://blogs.lcms.org/2016/infographic-mission-field-usa>.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael O. Emerson with Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 133.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 36. Emerson actually reports a lower percentage, 7 percent.
- <sup>4</sup> Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Curtiss DeYoung and Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*, Kindle ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), Kindle locations 1325–1327.
- <sup>6</sup> Such as the Augsburg confession, Article VII and VIII.
- <sup>7</sup> The words “Anglo” and “White” will be used interchangeably in this article.
- <sup>8</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Information was gathered through direct contact with pastors, LCMS Resources: Find a Church, and individual congregation/ministry websites.
- <sup>10</sup> No one particular term has surfaced as preferred or adequate. All three are used interchangeably.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>
- <sup>12</sup> Emerson, 193.
- <sup>13</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 84.
- <sup>14</sup> Concordia Seminary, St. Louis 2016 Multiethnic Symposium Committee discussions led by Dr. Andrew Bartelt, the committee chair.
- <sup>15</sup> Sociologist Richard N. Pitt observes that diverse congregations are often “more multicultural in makeup than multicultural in behavior.” Curtiss DeYoung and Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Radical Reconciliation* (Kindle locations 1348–1349).
- <sup>16</sup> Concordia Seminary faculty luncheon with Dr. Jack Dean Kingsbury on September 25, 2015.
- <sup>17</sup> Emerson and Woo, 164.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 166, 193.
- <sup>19</sup> DeYoung, *United by Faith*, 36.
- <sup>20</sup> Gailyn Van Rhee, *Missions, Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervon, 1996), 309.
- <sup>21</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 43.
- <sup>22</sup> Concordia Seminary Office of Urban and Cross-Cultural Ministry’s Comprehensive Recommendations, January 15, 2016.
- <sup>23</sup> American Advertising Federation, *Thought Leadership*. <http://aaf1.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Millennial-White-Paper.pdf>.

## Unity and Diversity Being a Multicultural Church

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Mason Keiji Okubo

When I heard that this year's Multiethnic Symposium at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, sought to start a conversation about what it means for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to transition from “a church *doing* multicultural ministry” to “*being* a multicultural church,” I was very intrigued. This embodies the heart of what I felt we must, as the LCMS, confront. In one sense, we are already a multicultural church, for God builds his holy church from peoples of all nations. However, here on Earth we struggle to live this out. While much multicultural ministry is already being done in the LCMS as a whole, it still has a way to go. It is my thesis that “becoming a multicultural church” will occur when our relationships with people of ethnic groups move to a deeper intimacy.

There are two barriers to this intimacy in cross-cultural ministry. Both have to do with the way we view the relationship between people and their cultures. The first barrier comes about if I *equate* a person with his culture. *Culture* is a generalization, a generalization about a group of people. It is therefore two dimensional. If I purposefully equate a person with a generalization, I reduce that person to a two-dimensional stereotype. Stereotyping always impedes intimacy as I never get to know the real person. On the other hand, if I say “the culture of a person doesn't matter” another barrier rises. Some people call it “being colorblind.” They seek to treat all people the same, independent of cultural background. However, in practice it means ignoring cultural differences. By stripping people of their culture, we reduce them to mere physical humanity. This “reductionism” will impede intimacy for the same reason as before. I will never get to know the real people, as people are their culture too. True multiculturalism will occur when we deal with people as three-dimensional, as people with distinctive cultures. True multiculturalism will occur when we can celebrate the diversity of cultures comprising the unity called the body of Christ.

As I was invited to share my personal insights on multicultural ministry, I thought it would be good to provide context: “Who am I, and what experiences formed my views?” At Immanuel First, we host a Vietnamese church plant headed by Rev. An Binh Thai, originally from Vietnam. Pastor Thai was called to Immanuel First in 2002 to reach

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out to the Vietnamese in the area. For the past twelve years An Thai and I have formed a team; An, heading the Vietnamese congregation, and I, the host congregation. We were both trained through the Cross-cultural Ministry Center (CMC), a joint seminary program developed by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and Concordia University, Irvine. I also serve on the Regional Mission Council, helping to support new church plants all over Region 2 in the Pacific Southwest District in California. I am also on the advisory council for the CMC program at Concordia, Irvine. As part of my work, I keep in contact with many of the CMC alumni, as well as a number of other ethnic church plants.

One of my reasons for having a passion for multicultural ministry is that I am an adult convert. As an adult convert, I have a unique point of view. I know what it feels like to “be an outsider” and I know what it feels like “to be on the inside.” If you are involved with multicultural ministries, you most likely will be working with adult converts, people who have established cultural views, views which are different from our Lutheran culture. For that reason, leaders who are capable of dual perspectives—like insider/outsider, culture A/culture B—are valuable when working with new Christians who are making the same transitions themselves. Another passion of mine is supporting and encouraging the ethnic pastors of the LCMS. Many of these pastors have sacrificed much so that the word of God might come to their people. I love that. I have learned the life stories of many of our ethnic pastors. Many of these stories read like adventure novels.

Take An Thai for example . . . In 1975, at the fall of his hometown in Vietnam to the communists, An and his family were forced to escape by traveling through Truong Son jungle. They were later captured and for three years they were incarcerated in a refugee camp. This experience has had a tremendous impact on his view of life. I once came to his office because I was aggravated by church problems. As I was venting about budgets, money problems, stewardship, and other things he nodded his head sagely. When I was done he smiled and said “You know, when Rose and I were younger, in Vietnam, life was very hard. Our daily meals were sometimes nothing more than two hard-boiled duck eggs mixed with fish sauce and a dish of boiled watercress. All this for a family of eight.” He said there were times when he thought they would be dead by the end of the week. But they persevered putting their trust in God. Throughout all, God provided for them. Over the years, he found that in the times of greatest destitution, God was always there for them. So, he told me, “Today, how could I not be fully confident that God would provide for our church?” That was a powerful witness! That is what I want to be part of! That is why I support the ethnic pastors in their ministry. His story wasn’t the only adventure I’ve heard. Many pastors have similar stories of overcoming persecution and suffering. It is their passion to share the gospel with their people in their heart language, and their willingness to suffer all, in the name of Christ, with the confidence that God would supply all they needed, which excites me. By the time An Thai left the refugee camp, over three hundred people had converted to Christianity. Many are still teaching in Vietnam and in the United States. The full story of An Thai’s journey to share the gospel can be found on our website.<sup>1</sup>

At Immanuel, our two congregations are maintained separately, primarily due to language differences. But we frequently share ministry together, in joint worship

services, and joint events. A few years ago we had a joint fundraiser to raise money for a project for the Vietnamese congregation. Now you might not think of this as being directly ministry, but I want to share with you that God works in the small things. In fact, many times I find that the encouragement of the saints happens in the details, not in the great programs we do. When we did this joint fundraiser, it was the first time that many of the English-speaking members of Immanuel had worked closely with the Vietnamese members. They totally enjoyed it. In fact, in working together, many have come to develop friendships with each other. Over the years, many of the English-speaking members have come to see Pastor Thai as family. This is where the multicultural church is coming into being at Immanuel First, in the small things. In fact, my experience is that it will be in the small movements, the small things that a true multicultural church will come about. I wish to share a personal experience.

A long time ago, when I was a new Christian and very young in my faith, I believed that all Christians loved everyone. As I knew Christ accepted me, I assumed everyone in the church accepted me. I had found a place to belong. One day, I found out that someone in the church refused to accept me. Not because of something I did but simply because I was Japanese. Now I've got to tell you, this devastated me. It made me feel very sad. I felt like the image that I had of the love of God permeating the people of God was a sham, a veneer which had been ripped away. It made me question whether other Christians felt the same way. It made me feel isolated. I shared my pain with a wise friend, Byron Porisch. Instead of trying to console me with simple platitudes he looked at me and said, "Mason, there are a lot of people here who have never met anyone of a different skin color, who have stereotyped views of ethnic people. Your job is not to fix all the sins of the world. However, if you stick around, as they get to know you, you may be the first ethnic person they will come to love." That is where I learned about the move from *doing* multicultural ministry to *being* a multicultural church. It will be in the small things. As the forerunners of this change, it is our task to be that someone-of-a-different-culture who people will come to love.

### **Why Is "Becoming a Multiethnic Church" Important?**

Since most of my ministry has been in California, the ministry targets of California are important to me. As it turns out all ministry in California is, by any definition, multicultural. According to the US Government Census, California has no one race as a majority.<sup>2</sup> Only 38.5 percent of the population is White (non-Hispanic). Of California residents, 43 percent speak a language other than English at home (Spanish being the state's second most spoken language). One third of all the Asians who live in America reside in California.<sup>3</sup> It has the fifth largest population of Black Americans.<sup>4</sup> Not only does the state have no majority, but the University of California, Irvine boasts a student population whose dominant culture is Asian (46 percent Asian, 27 percent Hispanic, and 16 percent White [non-Hispanic]).<sup>5</sup> While these statistics are for California, there are many locations with similar numbers. Therefore I conclude that not only is multiculturalism a critical issue in California, but in the entire United States as well. It is imperative therefore, as we carry out the Great Commission, as we go out to share the



good news, that we understand the consequences of a multicultural environment.

In fact, we are called not only to understand our multicultural environment, but also that the church by its very nature *is* multicultural. The Great Commission from Matthew 28:19, tells us to “make disciples of all nations (all peoples).” Revelation 7:9 says “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every *nation*, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” John 3:16 tells us “For God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The one Holy Church of God is a multicultural entity; peoples of all nations standing before the throne, joined in the one true faith, saved by the death and resurrection of Christ; multiple cultures joined into one church, not by the destruction of their individual identities and individual cultures, but by being subsumed into the one culture called the Holy Christian church; multiple cultures made clean by the blood of the one Lamb. Each is celebrated as a unique part of the body of Christ, yet shares one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

However, while we are a multicultural church, living that out in real life can be problematic. The United States is a country of many cultures. It is a multicultural community. According to a poll by Pew Research in 2014, almost 40 percent of the United States self-identifies as part of this multicultural setting.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, less than 5 percent of the LCMS self-identifies as multicultural.

It is important to understand exactly what this means. The point is not that 5 percent is a small number. Rather, the point is in the comparison. The representation of cultural groups in the LCMS are substantially lower than that of the United States overall. If movement into our church were truly free, then the demographics of the LCMS would mirror those of the United States. These statistics tell us that there is something blocking people of culture from joining the LCMS. Or maybe better put, there is something blocking the spread of the word of God by the LCMS. A church which limits itself to a single culture, and I stress the word *limits*, has allowed something to impede the spread of the gospel.

Summarizing these two issues:

- The population of the United States is substantially multicultural, to the point where in some locales, there is no majority culture.
- The LCMS ethnic demographics do not reflect that of the United States as a whole, indicating some blockage.

The key to *being* a multicultural church (i.e., the key to removing the blockage in spreading the gospel) is our ability to love. While that may sound a bit simple-minded or self-evident, in practice it is not that easy. I’m not talking about just *liking* someone who is different. I’m talking about *loving* someone who is different, someone who is radically different. I’m talking about having a relationship with someone who has different likes and tastes in food, different life experiences, different customs and traditions, different values; a person who in fact may have a totally different worldview. A worldview is the glasses through which you evaluate your experiences. A person of another culture evaluates many things differently. It is these differences in culture which give rise to conflict. It is these differences in culture which give rise to separation. In fact, it



won't be in the big things which different cultures will conflict. It will be in the small things. It is said that the main conflict in multicultural congregations will not be theological, but it will be in the kitchen. The making (and the breaking) of relationships will be in the small things, the details. Why are the small things so important? Because it will be here, in the small things, that love will be most evident. It is easy to sacrifice for the big issues, but the only reason you sacrifice in the small ones, is because of love.

An analogy of this is marriage. Doing multicultural ministry and being a multicultural church is as different as dating is from marriage. When you are dating, adapting to the ways of another is relatively easy. You do events together. You do things to try to please or help the other. But ultimately, at the end of the date, you go home. You go home and live your life as you always have. You may adopt some of the other's habits and lifestyles, but really they are just affectations. You only take on what you like.

Being married, however, means having a relationship with that person. It means incorporating that person into your life. It means considering their needs along with your own. It means being one flesh, sharing a life. It means intimacy. It means accepting differences. In fact it means more than accepting. It means being able to fully understand the differences and celebrating them. As a result, the first years of marriage can be very tough, because you are trying to learn to accommodate the lifestyles of another different human. To really be in a relationship is a lot of work. In the same way, being a multicultural church is like being married.

When two congregations of differing cultures wish to join, it is insufficient to leave things at the level of just "doing things together." Rather, "being together" means considering the other congregation's needs along with your own, communicating with them, including them in the decision making, being one flesh, sharing a life. It means intimacy. More than just accepting them but being able to fully understand the differences and being able to celebrate those differences.

In fact, it is even harder than that. Being a multicultural church is a little like being in an *arranged* marriage. We didn't choose the cultures we are "married" to. We were "married" because, through faith, we were all adopted by the same Father, redeemed by the same Savior. One of the consequences of an arranged marriage is fear. What if we are not compatible? What compromises will I have to make? How do I retain my identity? In the same way congregations are faced with the same challenges: fear of intimacy, and fear of losing identity.

However, in successful arranged marriages there will always be adaptation. There will be change on both sides. There must be because you are melding two different people into a new creation. But being married does not mean I have to lose my personality, my likes and dislikes, my personal set of values. What changes is that I now see myself with a new identity. I am a married person. What changes is how I respond to things. I respond as a spouse (eventually as a parent), as well as an individual. In the same way, in a multicultural setting we cannot fear adaptation or accommodation. We are not called to give up our own culture. When Immanuel First chose to be a multicultural church we did not have to become Vietnamese or adopt all Vietnamese ways (or vice-versa). But in becoming a multicultural church, we became a new creation.

Having identified lack of intimacy as a block to becoming a multicultural church, we need to look at another block. When you talk about multicultural ministry you have to consider stereotypes, in particular racial stereotypes. The word *stereotype* has a bad rap. Racial stereotyping sounds bad. I would suggest that stereotypes, in general, are not bad. A stereotype is a simplified image of a group, a two-dimensional caricature of a cultural group. Everyone uses them, and stereotypes can be helpful if they are true. We use them in business all the time. If you have ever read a manual on international business protocol, you might read something like “in dealing with Japanese businessmen you must show respect in this fashion . . .” Then you have just used a stereotype. In fact, if it weren’t for our ability to stereotype, we would be confused by the mass of information which bombards us regarding different cultures. But then stereotypes can also be bad. A person with who I am to have a relationship is more than a two-dimensional caricature. If I am to have a relationship with a real person I need to go beyond that. Stereotypes are generalities. They may be helpful to describe a group, but they will fail at the individual level. A stereotype becomes weak when applied to individuals. Refusing to deal with individuals as individuals and judging them by stereotypes is bigotry and racism. Having said all this, it is important to remember that everyone (of all ethnic groups) uses stereotypes, both the good and the bad. In fact, everyone is racist about something. Such is a visible sign of our sinful Adam. We cannot be surprised by this. We may not even be able to do anything about it. Nonetheless, we cannot allow racism to block intimacy. It may not even be our calling to rid the world of this sin. But if we are to move from doing multicultural ministry to being a multicultural church we must move beyond our two-dimensional stereotypes of ethnic groups.

This brings up another blockage on the other end of the spectrum from stereotypes. I call it racial color-blindness. When a person says they are color-blind, regarding race and skin color, they are saying they recognize differences in skin color but they do not judge or hold it against them. They act as if all people were the same color. Some might say that this is a good way to deal with people of culture. Be blind to color. However, to be blind to color is tantamount to being blind to culture.

If we are to move from doing multicultural ministry to being a multicultural church we must become the opposite of color-blind. We must become color-sensitive. Being a multicultural church is not being blind to differences, rather it means being aware of our differences—deeply aware—and being able to celebrate the diversity. We’re different. That’s okay. Believe it or not, we can still love each other. We can still see each other as brothers and sisters. Why? Because beyond our individual cultures, there is one culture which subsumes all others—the family of God. Within that greater culture we can celebrate the diversity of our individual cultures.

Finally, any movement toward being a multicultural church requires an understanding of what it means to be a minority in the United States. One has to ask what an ethnic person wants in a church. What keeps me in a church is the comfort that I feel there. I feel like I belong. In order for me to feel comfortable in a particular church, I want to know that I am accepted for what I am. I don’t want to be afraid to worship. I want to know that I am wanted, that I am loved by the people around me. The

transition to becoming a multicultural church will be slow, because the LCMS historically and statistically is an almost all-white church. When a person of color comes to a predominantly white church, even in the absence of discriminatory behavior, a thought comes up. “Why is it all white? Is it just because that is a reflection of the local population (which is fine) or is it because they want it all white (not so fine).” Even if it is just a reflection of the local population, the thought comes up, “why is the local population all white? Are they actively trying to keep it that way?” I’m not saying these thoughts are right or wrong. I’m not saying this is fair. But when it comes to becoming a multicultural church, as the leaders of tomorrow, we must be aware that this will happen. So we must ask ourselves, “Is there something we can do to alleviate such thoughts so that we might facilitate the diffusion of people of different cultures into the LCMS?”

When it comes to the transition from doing multicultural ministry to being a multicultural church there must be adaptation. I would like end with some thoughts Dr. Robert Newton, president of the California-Nevada-Hawaii district shared with us at one of our CMC meetings at Concordia, Irvine regarding new Christians entering established churches.

In Jesus’s time, the Jews saw non-Jews as sinners, “Outsiders.” Yet Jesus would frequently associate with them. And this angered the Jews. In answer, he told them the story of the prodigal son. Not only was the story about the love of a father for his erring son, but it was also about the older “loyal” son. The older son is angry because the father is celebrating the return of the prodigal son. Instead of demanding that the elder son accept the younger, however, the father says, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” [Lk 15:31]. So rather than choosing who is the insider and who is the outsider Jesus turned the whole issue on its head. It is not about who is in and who is out. It’s about family. “This brother of yours was dead and now is alive, he was lost and is found!” Rejoice.

The same goes for the transition to being a multicultural church. It is not a matter of who needs to adapt, who makes the decision, or how much effort we want to pour into ethnic ministry. Rather, when a person of any culture becomes a brother or sister in Christ, celebrate and be glad! I give thanks to God for all you who are part of our movement toward being a multicultural church.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel First Lutheran Vietnamese Church website. <http://www.immanuelfirst.org/vietnam3.html>

<sup>2</sup> “Race and Hispanic Origin,” U.S. Government census website. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/06>

<sup>3</sup> “U.S. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014,” (2014 Population Estimates Table view) U.S. Government Census factfinder website. <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Census 2010 (Table 5). <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "College profile University of California, Irvine" Collegedata.com website. [http://www.collegedata.com/cs/data/college/college\\_pg01\\_tmpl.jhtml?schoolId=730](http://www.collegedata.com/cs/data/college/college_pg01_tmpl.jhtml?schoolId=730)

<sup>6</sup> "How Racially Diverse are U.S. Religious Groups?" Pew Research July 27, 2015. [http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/ft\\_15-07-23\\_religiondiversityindex-1/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/ft_15-07-23_religiondiversityindex-1/)

## Theology for Culture Confrontation, Context, and Creation

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William W. Schumacher

The topic of culture, or the intersection of theology and culture, is obviously too large and too complex for a single essay. I do have some experience with the topic. I have spent a good deal of time learning about and working in cultural contexts quite different from the one I grew up in. I have read many books that define and analyze culture and that explore how theology and culture intersect and influence each other. And I have observed—even participated in—cultural mistakes and blunders that range from funny to disastrous. But the idea of culture has too many nuances for me to wrap my head around in any complete way, because culture is not one single thing, but a web of interrelated relationships, dynamics, concepts, and categories that all function (and change) at different scales and through history. Understanding even a small slice of such a vast field would require a thousand lifetimes. But while acknowledging incompleteness and the provisional nature of any generalizations on this topic, this essay will attempt to sketch several distinct ways we Christians use the concept of *culture* today, and comment on the theological implications of each view.

The word *culture* is one of the most complicated words in the English language, and it is not necessary for our present purposes to explore all the possible meanings. Our interest here is to consider three different ways contemporary Christians talk about culture. Each of these three common postures toward the world around us not only informs the way we regard the world but also shapes how we articulate our confession and witness in the world. I will call these three different senses of culture *confrontational*, *contextual*, and *creative*. Of course, these categories are not exhaustive, and the labels are not authoritative; I will try to explain what I mean by each, but there is nothing sacrosanct about the terminology. The key idea to be explored here is that the way we listen to and communicate the word of God will be shaped at least in part by our understanding of culture.

### Confrontational

We begin with what may be called a confrontational, or adversarial, use of the word culture. Christians today are accustomed to using the word culture in this adver-

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sarial sense, signifying that culture (the society around us, whether nationally or more local) is inherently threatening or dangerous, maybe even actively hostile. Such a suspicion, mistrust, and fear of culture may have been increasing among Christians in recent years, both in popular opinion and among a number of scholars. Back in 1992, sociologist James Davison Hunter published his book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America*, and he not only sparked a scholarly debate that continues today, but he also provided a powerful metaphor for describing the relationship that exists between Christianity and the culture in our time: warfare. “Culture war” has entered our vocabulary today, and this perception of the culture as, in some sense, the *enemy* of the church and of Christians has been bolstered by other writers. Many Christians feel that American society has become an increasingly alien and hostile environment. Some even suggest that Christians are now, or soon will be, actively persecuted by those who control the power in today’s post-Christian culture.

We should note some features of this perception of culture as the adversary of Christianity. An adversarial or confrontational view of culture almost always refers to “the culture” in the *singular*, in the sense of the dominant or pervasive set of attitudes within our society. This singular *culture* signals that the focus is national, not global, and this perspective is not really interested in comparison of different cultures, or in *cross-cultural* issues—to which we will turn below. When Christians refer to “the culture” in this adversarial sense, they are concentrating on just one culture, our own. This focus tends to blur or obscure the fact that American culture is not really *one* thing or *one* community, but a shifting mosaic of many, often competing communities, views, and value systems.

The second point to note about this view is that when people speak of the culture as the enemy, they are often referring to matters in the sphere of political or legal power. Political positions and legal structures are highly visible and easily identified, but they don’t tell the whole story. And one subtle consequence of putting power, law, and politics at the center of our attention is that we tend to frame our response in terms of policy, law, and a struggle for cultural power. In such an adversarial or confrontational relationship to culture, there have to be winners and losers, victories and defeats. The Supreme Court decided the Hosanna-Tabor<sup>1</sup> case in 2012 in the way we wanted it to go, so we count that as a small victory; last year’s Obergefell<sup>2</sup> decision on same-sex marriage was a big defeat. The point is that a *politicized* view of the culture means that both victories and defeats are charted on the same kind of map: a legal, political map.

Our own denomination has become gradually more identified with social and political conservatism. There are, of course, some good reasons for this trend: the gospel of life surely leads us to a strong and public pro-life position and opposition to a culture of death. But as Robert Putnam and David Campbell have documented,<sup>3</sup> the alignment of our denomination—like most others, in fact—with a particular *political* orientation goes beyond matters that are obviously or clearly connected to our theological convictions. Is “religious freedom” in the American political sense really a bedrock necessity for sound Lutheran confession of the gospel? Is there a meaningful connection between orthodox, biblical theology and defense of one’s Second Amendment rights of

gun ownership, or specific positions on matters such as immigration, right-to-work, the minimum wage, or voter ID laws? An individual's position on such political, social, and legal questions is generally founded on non-theological considerations, and we cannot prove that there is really a correct "Christian" position on such matters. Presumably people who share a common faith can differ on such things. Yet one has the sense that a significant majority of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) members line up on the Republican side of the aisle on this broad range of non-theological issues. The same—or rather, the reverse—is true of a theologically liberal denomination such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: a majority of their membership really do identify with progressive political causes: affirmative action, gun control, universal single-payer health insurance, punitive taxes on the super-wealthy, and whatever else characterizes American liberal politics today.

How has it happened that American denominations (including our own, but certainly not only ours) have become so strangely aligned with partisan political (but not obviously theological) issues? We might speculate that the connections, while not obvious, are nevertheless real, and that a particular theological position gradually shapes people's political and social views. However, in their research, Putnam and Campbell discovered that Americans are far more likely to change their religious affiliation to match their politics, than to modify their politics under the influence of the theology of their denomination. In other words, people vote with their feet. To put this more concretely, a person might realize at some point that the Bernie Sanders sticker on her car is the only one in the parking lot of her LCMS congregation on Sunday morning, and instead of reconsidering her support for democratic socialism and single-payer health care (from a confessional Lutheran perspective), she is likely to consider changing membership to a denomination more aligned with progressive politics. And how will her church and her pastor think about her departure? Will they consider her a confessional Lutheran who happens to disagree with certain conservative political positions, or will her political estrangement be read as a symptom of underlying theological error?

A third feature of this adversarial view of culture is that it fosters an idea that Christians can and should live separate from the culture, in some sense external to it, and as a result they come to value especially those things that set them apart from the surrounding community. If the culture is alien and hostile to the Christian faith, then Christian faithfulness needs to be expressed by resistance to the culture, by *difference* from the culture. The church needs to be different, and to look different. So of course the church's music does not sound like "normal" music in the wider culture; the church's architecture is like nothing else people see; the church's pastors dress in what "normal" people in the world do not. The church does not expect to "adapt" to the culture, but to *confront* it. The mode of communication for this stance toward the world is prophetic *proclamation*—picture Jonah in Nineveh, announcing God's looming judgment to a city he knew to be God's enemy.

We should acknowledge that this adversarial view of the culture can helpfully identify and resist features of widespread consensus, or positions that are being advocated, that are incompatible with the biblical witness and the confession of Jesus Christ

as Lord. Such a view may use “the culture” as a synonym for “the world” in such biblical passages as 1 John 3:13 (“Do not be surprised that the world hates you”); and John 16:33 (“In the world you will have tribulation, but I have overcome the world”). But what such a view does not capture is a sense of “the world” (or “the culture”) as the object of God’s love in Christ (e.g., Jn 3:16–17). And the idea that Christians can or should “escape” or withdraw from the culture in which they live is at best an oversimplification and at worst an illusion, as we shall now see. Instead, when our attitude toward culture is only adversarial, we are prone to being drawn into using the categories of power and control that are provided by this aspect of culture, and we wind up *on one side* (the “conservative” side, in our case) of the kind of struggle this culture understands.

## Contextual

Now we turn to the *contextual* meaning of the word “culture.” This contextual meaning has been popularized through the discipline of cultural anthropology, and it can be contrasted in many ways from the confrontational meaning. While a confrontational or adversarial posture argues for Christians to be separate and distinct from culture, a contextual or anthropological understanding assumes that Christians (like everybody else) live and interact as members of a culture, because “culture” denotes a comprehensive set of behaviors and framework for understanding, shared by a particular community or society. If we understand “culture” as the pervasive patterns of life and the assumptions and values that are implicitly shared by a community, one cannot really “withdraw” from the culture one finds oneself in, any more than a fish can “withdraw” from the water in which it swims.

In the anthropological view, we commonly speak of culture (and of cultures, in the plural—the use of the plural here is important) in the way anthropologists have used the term since the 1920s. In this sense, a culture is a complex set of behaviors, values, assumptions, allegiances, and products that constitute the shared worldview of a particular group (a nation, tribe, or society), and that shape and form their way of life together. This anthropological definition of culture has become a primary way of understanding differences between groups and communities; in this regard it is important to remember that this view of “culture” is not *evaluative* because it may describe and explain differences but does not *judge* whether a culture is good or bad, “primitive” or “advanced.” Donald Moorman’s defines culture this way:

An interrelated system of thought, belief, morality, ethical principles, social and family structures, and physical products developed by a group in order to organize life in ways which are understandable and workable so that they can survive, attain their valued goals, and successfully adapt to change in their environment.<sup>4</sup>

Notice how holistic and comprehensive such a definition is: it embraces everything that is shared by a particular group and that distinguishes that group from other groups. Such a definition of “culture” certainly includes external, observable things such



as behavior, actions, and the things people make and use (technology and art). But it also seeks to comprehend the unseen, often unspoken but even more important elements of assumptions, values, and allegiances. From such an anthropological definition, a number of important insights follow.

- Culture is part of creation, both in the sense of being a natural, universal feature of created human life, and in the sense of being a collaborative, communal human creation, something which people make or produce together. It is not innate. It is not genetic. It is not biologically connected with race. (Indeed, it is important to point out that “race” is better understood as a culturally conditioned and contextually defined category, rather than a scientific “fact” of human biology.) To say that something is “cultural” means that it is not essential or inherent in human nature. A human culture is the result of countless decisions, choices, and ideas made by a group of people over a long time. Yet, at the same time, participation in a culture is not optional for any of us; human beings are created to live in structured social relationships, which means that we are in some sense inherently “cultural” by design. It is not a matter of personal preference whether one “has a culture” or not, but that does not mean that all of us belong to the same culture.
- Culture is learned. This means that cultural knowledge, the ability to behave according to norms and relate to others and generally be a functioning member of a community must be transmitted from one generation to the next. Cultural learning is sometimes explicit and formal, but probably more often implicit and informal. Newborn Chinese babies do not automatically “fit in” Chinese culture any more than they genetically speak Chinese. Culture, like language, is a system of shared, learned behavior, and the system must be gradually learned over time by each individual. Among many other implications, this fact means that a person can learn a second culture in much the same way that she or he can learn a second language. As with any learned behavior, some people learn more quickly and more thoroughly than others: some people seem to have a gift for learning other cultures. But all human beings appear to be wired from birth, not with this or that specific culture, but with the mental, emotional, and relational “hardware” we need to learn and become members of a culture.
- Culture is comprehensive and integrative. Different aspects of a culture hang together in internally consistent ways and tend to reinforce the cohesive whole, so that individuals and communities can make

sense of everything in their experience. This accounts for the pervasive influence our culture has on how we think and how we behave. The analogy to language is again instructive, since the categories and structures provided for in the particular language we speak wind up shaping the ways we perceive the world and make decisions.<sup>5</sup> Any culture (understood in this anthropological sense) includes not only superficial, external features, but also fundamental assumptions about what is and is not real and how the universe works. The comprehensiveness of culture makes it difficult for me to be clearly aware of my own cultural perspective, and makes me resist changes that challenge my cultural assumptions.

- But culture is also dynamic. All cultures are in constant processes of change and transformation as they encounter new challenges, assimilate new experiences, and respond to new situations (including contact with other cultures). The comprehensive, internal consistency of cultures makes them resist fundamental change, but cultures can and do change. As an anthropologist may travel to a distant country to observe and try to understand a foreign culture, historians work to understand and interpret that foreign country we call the past. The discipline of history is necessary and difficult because all cultures, including our own, change over time. One powerful force driving such cultural change is the influence of the word of God, as the gospel begins to infiltrate lives and relationships, rearrange values, and call into question presuppositions and allegiances.

Much more could be said about this anthropological view of culture(s), and its importance for Christian theology and mission. We could call this *anthropological* meaning of culture the *missionary* meaning. By that I mean that using these linguistic, ethnographic, and analytical tools to gain insight into the deep-seated assumptions, values, and allegiances of communities of people makes possible the effective communication of the gospel message to people who otherwise could not hear it, or at least could not hear it accurately and correctly.

Missiologists and missionaries have been pioneers in the field, and in related fields of linguistics, ethnography, and ethnomusicology.<sup>6</sup> We have learned to understand some of the dynamics of cultural change when the gospel is introduced into a new culture; we are able to grapple with the intricacies of translation to communicate the meaning of the biblical text. Both the way we articulate theology and the forms of church life take into account the specific cultural context in which we speak and live. The anthropological meaning of culture calls forth humility in the messenger who carries the gospel message from one culture to another, since what we do not know about a new culture is more important than what we know. And according to this understanding of culture, communication is determined not by what is in my head when

I speak (my knowledge, my intentions, etc.) but rather by what my hearers *hear* and understand.

According to the anthropological view of cultural diversity, the church does not stand over against “the culture,” but rather lives and participates within the multiplicity of human cultures. This complicates the way we think about the church. Cultural differences within the church can, of course, create tensions that challenge the church’s unity. Our response to such a challenge needs to keep in mind a key (but perhaps disturbing) insight of the anthropological (or missionary) view of culture. The recognition that there are many cultures, and that all of us live and move within a cultural context, means that *none* of us sits on a supercultural or transcultural perch from which we can decisively evaluate cultures, arbitrate cultural differences, or define authoritatively what “Christian culture” is supposed to look like. We all are pressed to acknowledge that we are not the source and center of theological truth, and that while the word of God speaks universal and eternal truth, our own theological knowledge and insight are not necessarily normative for everyone else.

As we live in close contact with people who are very different from us, this recognition can be uncomfortable. But it is important for all of us to realize that, in one sense, each of us hears the saving gospel in a cross-cultural communication. The word of God is not native to my tribe, or to yours. With the help of lots of people who were listening to that word of God before I was, the gospel was brought to bear in my life in specific ways that I could *hear*.

Because each of us is on the receiving end of cross-cultural communication of the gospel, and because I cannot claim that my own culture is standard or normative, cultural diversity is the normal condition of the church. Diversity is not a temporary concession we have to make until we can teach “those people” to behave and think properly. Neither is diversity a lofty goal or ideal toward which we are obliged to strive. No, diversity is the normal (and uncomfortable) condition of the church. As Kathryn Tanner has written,

Diversity is a salutary reminder, moreover, that Christians cannot control the movements of the God they hope to serve. It helps them remain open to the Word by keeping them from taking their own view of things for granted. . . . The recognition of God’s free and uncontrollable Word, which respect for Christian diversity spreads, desocializes Christians, so to speak; it *breaks the habit of the normal*, and thereby frees them for renewed attention to the Word.<sup>7</sup>

Note that when Tanner talks about “diversity” as a normal (and good) implication of “culture” for theology, she also has in mind the various specific forms in which the word of God is proclaimed and communicated within particular cultural contexts. In other words, theology itself is culturally conditioned, fitted to but also shaped by the context in which the word of God is communicated and heard. Because cultures are plural and diverse, we should expect that theologies will in some sense be plural and diverse rather than monolithic and uniform across all times and places. Even those of us

who are comfortable with and welcome cultural diversity may worry about theological diversity. Does our non-evaluative, anthropological neutrality extend to *theological* differences? Does this mean that, in the end, it becomes impossible to talk about “wrong” theology? Well, no, it probably does not mean that. It does mean that we have to work to maintain a distinction between the word of God and “our theology,” a distinction we have not always kept clear. With that distinction in mind, we can agree with Tanner when she says, “the Word of God always retains sovereignty over the words in which it is once proclaimed.”<sup>8</sup> And at the same time we realize that theological assertions (those of others and also our own) are attempts to communicate adequately the sovereign word in a particular setting, addressing specific concerns, for a certain community. Every such attempt can be contested, and probably no such attempt is completely adequate for all times and places. Indeed, the challenge of other views (and thus of *theological* diversity) can be seen as inescapably important: “One should not try to contain diversity by getting rid of it because diversity involves certain positive goods. Human judgment is fallible and therefore the chance for correction by others who disagree with one is a valuable thing.”<sup>9</sup> Valuable, perhaps; uncomfortable and destabilizing, certainly.

It seems that American Christians (including Christians in our own denomination) continue to be ambivalent about “culture” and are broadly divided between *confrontational* and *contextual* postures. This division and ambivalence may help account for some tensions and arguments among us: those who embrace cultures as necessary and good work to adapt theological language and forms of church life to maximize contextual effectiveness, while those whose cultural posture is mostly adversarial or confrontational warn against the danger of unfaithfulness if we are too much influenced by the anti-Christian culture around us. And since both adversarial and anthropological views of culture are internally consistent and at least partially true, there is no easy way to resolve such tensions or to settle such arguments.

## Creative

We need not be satisfied with a choice between the two alternative views of culture described above. As was mentioned at the outset, “culture” is an enormously complex term, and we must resist the temptation to oversimplify it into a binary tension of adversarial and anthropological approaches.

A word of explanation is in order about the term “creative.” In common usage, creativity conjures ideas of special activities by uniquely talented artists. But such a specialized artistic sense of creativity is only a small part of Christians’ creative work in the world. Christian involvement in the fine arts, of course, has a noble and important history. Yet of much more importance for our present point is the connection, not to special artistic gifts or to some high aesthetic standard, but to the common creativity of ordinary human work. In other words, a creative posture of Christians toward culture prompts us to consider the myriad ways in which our daily vocations collectively and gradually make (and constantly re-make) this complex network of values, relationships, and behaviors that we call a “culture.”

A valuable guide to this creative posture toward culture is Andy Crouch’s 2008

book *Culture Making*,<sup>10</sup> in which he helps Christians recover the sense that culture is something we human beings *do* and *make* together. Culture is not simply a fixed fact of our environment to which we react either positively or negatively, but rather the cumulative, collaborative product of innumerable cultural “goods”—artefacts and behaviors, large and small, by which we not only survive but collectively shape the world we live in. (Crouch considers examples that range from omelets to the interstate highway system to illustrate what he means by cultural goods.) In this way, “culture” can be understood less as a static noun and more as a *verb*; culture is something we *do*, collectively, over time, incremental, tactically not strategically, not under individual control. Crouch prompts us to ask questions about any “cultural good,” and the questions include “What does this make possible?” and “What does this make impossible?”

Crouch makes the case that Christians are not called to be mere critics or consumers of culture, but active, creative participants who add their own cultural goods to the shared life of their communities. Throughout Crouch’s articulate and timely book, Lutheran readers will hear the resonance with a robust doctrine of vocation. Sometimes Lutherans are satisfied with a stunted and stagnant notion of vocation that simply endorses the social status quo and suggests a passive resignation to the circumscribed duties of one’s “station.” But properly understood, the familiar Lutheran language of vocation conveys something closer to Crouch’s vision of Christians (and indeed all humans) as “creators and cultivators . . . artists and gardeners . . . creaturely creators.”<sup>11</sup>

Theologically, a creative stance toward culture arises from a healthy doctrine of creation, because creation is both *mundane* and *mediated*. Creation—and creativity—is mundane because we encounter it literally everywhere in our experience of the world. And God’s creative work is also mediated through the providential working of all that he has made, including particularly through the vocational activity of human “artists and gardeners.” Human life flourishes when God’s human creatures do their work with diligence, care, and skill. The lights come on; you can drink the water; there is food on the table; the sick receive medicine; and criminals and other enemies are held in check or punished. None of this happens perfectly, of course, and I have seen plenty of places where some of these things are done very poorly or haphazardly. But to the extent such work is done—by human beings—life is better, more secure, and richer for all of us. All such things and countless more are the Creator’s work, and the farmers, doctors, engineers, mothers, bakers, butchers, bookkeepers, babysitters, bankers, builders, bassoonists, and all the others are the Creator’s fingers at work in the world.

Crouch helps us grasp and contemplate this creative posture toward culture in a number of important ways, and introduces some useful vocabulary. One crucial insight he develops is that cultural goods that “extend the horizons of the possible” are generally initiated at the margins, not at the center; in other words, most creative cultural contributions do not emanate from the positions in which power of various kinds is wielded. “Cultural power” is almost an oxymoron, since cultural “control” is mostly an illusion, especially at larger scales. This suggests that there is an appropriate *smallness* to many or most of our cultural efforts. Instead of proposing a grand strategy to seize cultural control, Crouch invites us to join what amounts to a movement that is marginal

(rather than central), tactical (rather than strategic), and modest in scale.

The modest scale of our “culture making” can be described as artisanal (if I may be forgiven for using one of the buzzwords of contemporary marketing), and that term can help us consider our creative involvement in culture in other ways. An artisan is not just a worker, but someone who works with skill and care, paying attention to the quality of the materials and the usefulness and excellence of the product. The contemporary artisanal movement (in food, drink, furniture, clothing—even pencil sharpening!) is a genuine and widespread interest in things that are handmade, local, simplified, and produced with care, skill, and integrity.<sup>12</sup> A mere worker cares about work primarily as a means to an end—a paycheck. But an artisan labors in a loving, attentive connection to the work itself. The human (artisanal rather than industrial) scale of our efforts to produce cultural goods and the loving connection to doing well something that is, in itself, well worth doing, both distinguish this view of work, vocation, and culture from the abstractions of the culture wars and from the commodification of everything (which reduces all human activity to economics). Those distinctions are important, for they free us to concentrate on the work before us. And as Crouch pleads, “What is most needed in our time are Christians who are deeply serious about cultivating and creating but who wear that seriousness lightly—who are not desperately trying to change the world but who also wake up every morning eager to create.”<sup>13</sup>

We do well to ponder how revolutionary such a posture toward culture (and work, and vocation) can be. The society in which we live is so permeated by contrary assumptions about work and value that we may have difficulty imagining a fundamentally different frame of reference. As Dorothy L. Sayers wrote, anticipating the challenges of the post–World War II economy, what is needed urgently is an approach to economic (and cultural) life that is not *merely* economic.

The habit of thinking about work as something one does to make money is so ingrained in us that we can scarcely imagine what a revolutionary change it would be to think about it instead in terms of the work done. To do so would mean taking the attitude of mind we reserve for unpaid work—our hobbies, our leisure interests, the things we make and do for pleasure—and making that the standard of all our judgments about things and people. We should ask of an enterprise, not “will it pay?” but “is it good?”; of a man, not “what does he make?” but “what is his work worth?”; of goods, not “can we induce people to buy them?” but “are they useful things well made?”; of employment, not “how much a week?” but “will it exercise my faculties to the utmost?” And shareholders in—let us say—brewing companies, would astonish the directorate by arising at the shareholders’ meetings and demanding to know, not merely, where the profits go or what dividends are to be paid, not even merely whether the workers’ wages are sufficient and the conditions of labor satisfactory, but loudly, and with a proper sense of personal responsibility: “What goes into the beer?”<sup>14</sup>

Sayers (who was known to enjoy a companionable pint now and then) would no doubt approve of the craft beer movement. In spite of the staggering monetary power of mega-mergers, millions of people, including owners and stockholders, do indeed clamor “with a proper sense of personal responsibility” to put quality, skill, and care ahead of mere financial arithmetic to make something worth making. That encouraging fact may serve as a metaphor and sign of the kind of artisanal, creative approach to culture that echoes a deep appreciation of vocation.

A creative posture, in which Christians participate in making cultural goods rather than vying for (illusory) cultural power, implies hope. The Christian hope that fuels us “artists and gardeners” is a far cry from mere optimism about the ultimate success of our efforts, or the expectation of victory in the “culture wars.” Eschatological hope restores us to—rather than rescues us from—the world, and that restoration is the missional dimension of our creative, cultural work. As missiologist David Bosch wrote:

We need an eschatology for mission which is both future-directed and oriented to the here and now. It must be an eschatology that holds in creative and redemptive tension the already and the not yet; the world of sin and rebellion, and the world God loves; the new age that has already begun and the old that has not yet ended (Manson 1953: 370f); justice as well as justification; the gospel of liberation and the gospel of salvation. Christian hope does not spring from despair about the present. We hope because of what we have already experienced. Christian hope is both possession and yearning, repose and activity, arrival and being on the way. Since God’s victory is certain, believers can work both patiently and enthusiastically, blending careful planning with urgent obedience.<sup>15</sup>

Crouch’s idea of creative participation in culture flows from, rather than aims at, the eschatological transformation of the world and of culture. Crouch’s argues that we *cannot* “change the world,” despite the contemporary fascination of such claims. We can and do make “cultural goods,” which may (if we work with skill and care) bring about small changes, especially on small scales. “But we are not here to change the world, generally speaking. Indeed, the good news is *the world is already changed, in a specific and astonishing way*. God’s ways are not our ways. The culture he would have us make will undoubtedly be far more influential, and far more marginal, than our ambitions could ever fathom.”<sup>16</sup> We do not need to change the world: God has done that already. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus did and do change the world permanently and astonishingly. Our work and our creativity are ripples of grace that continue to spread from that singular event.

When we remember such hope, and apply such wisdom, to that part of our cultural work which directly touches the church, what kind of “culture” are we making? What are we making of the world together? Maybe we should not be so quick to answer “a multiethnic church” (as distinct from “a church that does ethnic ministry”), since God is the one who makes the church, and he has *already* made his church multiethnic. If we revise our answer and say we are making “a multiethnic LCMS,” we



remind ourselves that the LCMS (like each of its congregations and local ministries) is, at least in part, something we “make” together. And then Crouch’s questions lead us to think about what we “make” in fresh ways. We are, collectively and cumulatively, making congregations, local ministries—and a denomination—that look, sound, and taste differently than they do now. To echo Crouch’s probing questions, what does this kind of “culture making” make *possible*? What does it make *impossible*? It makes possible a community that embraces and celebrates “God’s dream” (to use the delightful phrase of my colleague Kou Seying) and God’s saving work. Both God’s work and our celebration of it crosses boundaries and barriers that separate people (race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, etc.), and this little bit of “culture making” we do together produces new cultural goods, artefacts that contribute in various ways to the wider culture of which we are a part. This is not “changing the world” but adding something new to it: and the something new we add will find its value based on what it makes possible and what it makes impossible. And what does this new cultural artifact of a multiethnic LCMS make impossible? It makes it impossible for me to be satisfied to be “church” without you. It makes *impossible* our old contentment with being church without each other.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/hosanna-tabor-evangelical-lutheran-church-and-school-v-eoc/>. Accessed June 4, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/obergefell-v-hodges/>. Accessed June 4, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012). Their chapter 12, “Echo Chambers: Politics Within Congregations,” is especially incisive on the point I am making here.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Moorman, *Harvest Waiting* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> There is some interesting recent research that suggests that specific language structures (verb tenses) may have a surprising but measurable impact on economic behavior. Cf. M. Keith Chen, “The Effect of Language on Economic Behavior: Evidence from Savings Rates, Health Behaviors, and Retirement Assets” (December 12, 2012). Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper No. 1820. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1914379>. Accessed June 4, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Andrew Walls, “The Nineteenth-Century Missionary as Scholar,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 187ff.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 175 (emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>12</sup> [http://cultureby.com/2006/11/the\\_artisanal\\_m.html](http://cultureby.com/2006/11/the_artisanal_m.html). Accessed June 4, 2016. And of course someone has already thought about “artisanal church”:

<http://homebrewedchristianity.com/2014/10/29/small-batch-artisanal-church/>. Accessed June 4, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1995), 70–71.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 502.

<sup>16</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, 7 (emphasis original).



# Hispanic Is Not What You Think

## Reimagining Hispanic Identity, Implications for an Increasingly Global Church

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

In 1987, seminary formation in the United States took me to Venezuela, where I served as a vicar under the supervision of the bishop of the national church body. Some months into the vicarage, I came across a Catholic priest at a local bookstore. I was wearing a clerical collar. The priest approached me and asked where I worked. I told him that I was serving an internship with the Lutheran Church of Venezuela. He was taken aback by my comment and said something like, “Latino and Lutheran? That’s impossible!” With a background in sociology, the priest understandably viewed the historical development of Latin American societies as a reality closely linked to the Spanish Catholic presence in the Americas since colonial times. So he had a hard time placing someone like me in the typical historical framework. It was difficult to imagine that a Latino could also be a Lutheran, a label he associated with isolated German enclaves in the Americas. I was a bit of an odd duck.

The perceived problem was not that I was Lutheran or Latino. The problem was the *mestizaje*, the daring “coming together” of two unlikely partners. That encounter has led me to ask what it means to be Latino—or to use a term often employed in the United States, what it means to be Hispanic—and what the Hispanic experience might contribute to the Lutheran church. In this essay, I show how US Hispanic identity is best understood as a *mestizaje* that arises from the interaction of two geographical and historical axes, namely, a cross Atlantic European-American axis and a Latin American-North American axis. I focus on racial-ethnic, linguistic, and theological forms of *mestizaje* in order to illustrate how Hispanic identity can be described historically as a process of negotiation between local particularity and universal transcendence, or between diversity or plurality and unity. Finally, I argue that the Hispanic experience of *mestizaje* can function as a cultural sign with the pedagogical capacity to remind the Christian church, including the Lutheran family, of her own catholic and intercultural identity in the world.

### Hispanic Identity along Two Axes

Who is a Hispanic anyway? In the United States, the widespread use of the term

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“Hispanic” to refer to a homogenous group of people with ties to Latin America is a recent phenomenon. In his book *Brown*, Richard Rodriguez attributes his being “baptized Hispanic” to his “godfather” Richard Nixon.<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez reminds us that it was during the Nixon administration that the term “Hispanic” was adopted as a legal category.<sup>2</sup> And Nixon said, “Let there be Hispanic. And it was.”<sup>3</sup>

The OMB Statistical Directive 15 adopted in 1977 included the following categories: Black, White, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, and, of course, Hispanic. While the standards have evolved over time, the “Hispanic” entry remains, not a racial category but an ethnic category, inclusive of all races and racial mixing represented by people with roots in Latin America. Yet Hispanics are not exactly Latin Americans. You become a Hispanic in the United States. The conception of the “Hispanic” as a semi-homogenous group is a US construct designed to distinguish European White from “Hispanic” Brown. The somewhat sloppy use of the term “Hispanic” in the United States to refer to Latin Americans south of the US-Mexico border constitutes what Rodriguez calls an attempt by the United States to cross illegally its own Nixonian border.<sup>4</sup>

Census language points us to an important insight: Hispanic identity cannot be conceived except along a North-South axis, that is, a United States-Latin American axis. Hispanic cannot be grasped apart from the rise of the United States as a global power in the nineteenth century and its relationship to, or perhaps collision with, Latin American neighbors, including especially but not exclusively Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. “Hispanic” was a part of the United States before the term was reimagined as a legality under Nixon. To cite one salient example: Mexicans lived in California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona, and western portions of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming before these formerly Mexican territories became part of the United States after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848. Latin America was not just down there. It was up here! Mexicans did not cross the border. The border crossed them.

Language has its limits. Despite the common move in translation to equate the English word “Hispanic” with the Spanish word *hispano*, the latter term drives more specifically at the Spanish roots of the Americas. After all, “hispano/a” has its roots in “Hispania,” the Roman name for what is now Spain. Arguably, *hispanola* (the Spanish word) hints more at a link with Spain than with the United States. We learn another important point: Hispanic identity cannot be thought of apart from a cross Atlantic European-Latin American axis, that is, without considering above all the cultural clash of Spain as a rising global power in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the indigenous people of the Americas (and soon thereafter, the African slaves), and their descendants.

What does it mean to be “Hispanic” up here, or *hispanola* down there? Since the nineteenth century, the question of identity has plagued Latin American and US Hispanic intellectuals. We will argue that this question matters to the church. We will problematize the homogenizing claim that there is an ideal Latin American or US Hispanic prototype, arguing instead that Hispanic identity must be reimagined more broadly as an ongoing negotiation between local particularity and global community, or

in more colloquial language, between diversity or plurality, and unity. Lessons learned from this grappling with Hispanic identity will serve as a lens to explore, and hopefully reclaim, our Christian (and Lutheran) identity in and for an increasingly global church.

### Hispanic Identity along a European-American Axis

We have argued that Hispanic identity must be seen along both a North American (US)-Latin American axis and a European (Spanish)-American axis. Let us focus on the latter axis, the cross Atlantic one, in which the terms “America” and “American” will be used not as references to the United States but, more broadly, as references to the Americas impacted by the Spanish presence, whether north or south of the Rio Grande.

With the exception of towering figures like Friar Bartolomé de las Casas in the sixteenth century and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in the seventeenth century, both of whom had an emerging critical “American” (rather than a colonial European) outlook on the world in their views of the dignity and rights of indigenous people and women respectively, the quest for a Latin American identity begins with the age of independence movements in the nineteenth century. Prior to the age of the *gritos* or cries for independence, Americans were ruled by *peninsulares* sent by the Spanish Crown from the Iberian Peninsula. The practice was increasingly resented by up-and-coming *criollos* or creoles born in the New World who felt they had a right to look after their own local affairs. A hunger for particularity in self-governance was in the making.

In his book *The History of Latin America*, Marshall C. Eakin presents the history of the region as a quest for identity in the New World that arises because of the “collision of cultures” between Spain and America.<sup>5</sup> The independence movements in the nineteenth century are an example of such a collision, ending centuries of colonial rule. Creoles like Simón Bolívar began to see themselves as American, not Spanish. Yet new American nation-building projects led by creoles, while recognizing and romanticizing the unique mixed racial makeup or *mestizaje* of the indigenous peoples of the region, tended to favor the re-creation of America as a little Europe.<sup>6</sup> Despite their political differences, for example, nineteenth-century liberals and conservatives in the Americas agreed on the Europeanizing of the new nations.<sup>7</sup> Liberals appealed to the secular values of the Enlightenment, which included positive ideas such as the end of slavery but also meant suspicion of the influence of the Catholic Church’s political power and, at times, spiritual influence in the region. Conservatives, on the other hand, wanted to preserve much of the old colonial order and religious customs, but also centralized governments ruled by *mestizo* elites, and slave labor. However, in practice, upon coming to power, both ideologies led to good old dictatorial governments. A fuller, deeper American identity had yet to emerge, which neither liberal nor conservative groups could provide in the political sphere.

Eakin argues that it is especially in the twentieth century that a deeper conscious move towards a more American identity grounded in the local particularities of mixed peoples takes hold in Latin America, as evident in the work of literary giants such as Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Octavio Paz.<sup>8</sup> These authors paint

vivid images of the collision but also intimacy between different cultures, worldviews, and generations, using local realities and landscapes in fictional but also historically responsible ways to offer a transcendent message about our common human condition. In their works, regional particularity is the starting point to get to human commonality.

Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes once noted that Mexicans came from the Aztecs, Peruvians from the Incas, and Argentinians from the ships.<sup>9</sup> The mention of ships refers to the largely European roots of Argentina due to later immigration in comparison to other Latin American countries. The point is that Latin Americans differ from each other enough to avoid the notion of a homogenous cultural region. Eakin suggests that the unique diversity of the region generally differs from one nation to another depending on their dominant racial and ethnic composition. Speaking of “four major Americas,” he offers these categories of identity, namely, Latin (or Hispanophile), Indo, Afro, and Mestizo Latin Americans.<sup>10</sup> Closer ties to European identity (the Latin group) may be seen in countries like Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. Countries like Bolivia, Guatemala, and Peru, on the other hand, arguably tend to see their identity more through Indo or indigenous eyes, while nations like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico would do so mainly through Afro and mulatto eyes. Mexico, Nicaragua, and Paraguay arguably fall more into the Mestizo framework.

These categories are often transgressed given their intermingling in real life. At times, this intermingling is denied, or its importance minimized, given the continuous struggle with racism and prejudice in the region. The notion that the ideal Latin American—or US Hispanic, for that matter—is a light-skinned mestizo is problematic. A recent demographic study of the population of colonial Panama notes that, in spite of the initial dominant influence of white males in the process of miscegenation and the late recognition of the dignity of colored peoples in Panama’s history, the country had already become mulatto and thus darker-skinned by the seventeenth century through interracial marriage.<sup>11</sup> Black blood is likely to run even through the whitest-looking Panamanians. Similar dynamics were at work in places like Cuba and New Orleans. Later, Asian migration to the Americas added complexity to familiar categories. Consider Ana Gabriel, a famous Mexican singer, born María Guadalupe Araújo Yong, which means she comes from a devout Catholic family (Guadalupe for the brown Virgin) and that she is Chinese on her mother’s side (Yong). You can watch a YouTube video of Ana Gabriel singing a new arrangement of one of her classic Latin Rock-style ballads in a Dominican merengue rhythm to screaming Chilean fans in Viña del Mar.<sup>12</sup> The secret is out; racial, linguistic, cultural miscegenation is part of our American identity from south to north.

There is no denying, however, that the Spanish colonization of the Americas left a profound mark in the region through the uniform use of the Spanish (more precisely, Castilian) language across its territories and the spread of Catholicism as the official religion in the land. With some exceptions, language and religion provided a unity to the New World the likes of which had not been seen even in the Iberian Peninsula itself prior to 1492, when several languages were spoken and various religions were practiced there before the Kingdom of Castile and Aragon made Castilian and Catholicism the

official language and religion of the empire. While such linguistic and religious unity could not reach the hearts of all people in America, it still had a dramatic impact on the region as a whole. Unity and particularity engaged in an awkward dance that led to the creation of a new world. Indigenous groups learned Spanish, and Spanish started borrowing terms from the indigenous languages of the Americas.<sup>13</sup> Many Americanisms in the region also borrowed from African languages.<sup>14</sup> When it came to religion, indigenous people grasped the Catholic faith through symbols brought from the Old World and through their own cultural symbols. At times, this led to syncretism; other times, to a culturally rich communication of the faith. The church had to decide if a particular cultural form had replaced or promoted the Christian story. Overtime, new Christians in their own right contributed to the presentation of the faith. Discerning the salutary interaction between the church's oneness and catholicity in the Americas was, and still is, an ongoing task.

In *El laberinto de la soledad* (*Labyrinth of Solitude*)<sup>15</sup>, a literary reflection on Mexican identity, Octavio Paz refers to the Spanish colonial project as a deliberate attempt to create unity out of the cultural and political plurality that existed before Hernan Cortes's conquest of the Aztec Empire. Faced with the variety of races, languages, and states in the pre-Hispanic world, the Spanish posit one language, one faith, one Lord. This collision between unity and diversity defines what Paz calls the historic Mexican's (and he adds, Latin American's) struggle and quest to grapple with his or her identity and contribution in the world. Such quest is a must lest he or she wishes to remain alone in the world, unsure in a labyrinth of solitude of who he or she is, where to go next, and what to offer to the global family. Such a quest will evade the historic impact of neither the heritage of Spain nor local indigenous peoples.

Paz argues that nineteenth-century Latin American Liberals' appropriation of Enlightenment ideals bypassed dealing with the consequences of the colonial system inherited from Spain, including the place of religion in private and public life. Moreover, he argues that the Conservatives' simplistic fixation with returning to old Catholic Spain could not foster the active integration of local indigenous appropriations of the faith. Octavio Paz's analysis is instructive because it suggests two extremes to avoid when engaging Latin American peoples. We can extend his thoughts to the missionary task among Latinos/as in the United States. One danger is to advance ideas and forms of life without accounting for the *worldview* of local peoples, to merely translate without engaging or incarnating. I am reminded of a former North American missionary to rural Panama, who rightly taught the family of a soon-to-be baptized child that the sacrament was a means of redemption from sin, only to see a child wearing a red woolen thread tied around his wrist on the day of the baptism.<sup>16</sup> "Why is the child wearing the red thread?" he asked. "To protect him from the evil eye, pastor," said the parents. The catechist had forgotten that, in a place where the worldview is seen in spiritual terms, as a cosmic battle between powers, baptism is also a means of redemption from spirits that keep us in bondage to sins, fears, and other forms of oppression—a point that the missionary had failed to consider.

There is also the related danger of dealing with local peoples in a way that they

remain passive in the process of evangelization, catechesis, and leadership formation, and thus are not formed to reflect actively, that is, critically and constructively, on what they hear and see. This reminds me of a Lutheran church in Latin America, where a congregant from an indigenous group struggled to play an organ that American missionaries had left behind. After years of trying to perpetuate the familiar sounds heard from missionaries, members of the congregation suggested that perhaps he try another approach. It had not occurred to this man that he could also play hymns and canticles with instruments and rhythms more familiar to him and his people. To Christianize was not to Americanize. Yet the musician had not gotten the message. He had become a passive recipient of foreign models, but not yet a person formed to make the word intelligible to himself and his people. He knew how to imitate but not yet how to proclaim.

### **Hispanic Identity along a North American-Latin American Axis**

Let us now look at the problem of defining Hispanic identity along a North American-Latin American axis. While Latin American identity, depending on the country, has had to negotiate the influence of the United States in its midst, we will focus on the Hispanic in this country, who is in a unique position of closeness to both Latin America and the United States. As one author puts it, “Latinos are at once an extremity of Hispanic civilization in the United States and also an ethnic minority—north and south in one.”<sup>17</sup>

Octavio Paz, who as a young student spent some time in the United States, once referred to feeling that he was “ni de aquí ni de allá,” that is, neither from here nor from there.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, referring to the hybrid Galilean identity of Mexican-Americans, Catholic theologian Virgilio Elizondo has noted how—like Galileans who lived in the borderlands between Jewish and Gentile cultures in Jesus’s day—they are perceived as being neither Mexican enough for the Mexicans nor American enough for the North Americans.<sup>19</sup> Yet while they may be seen as odd on either side of the cultural border, Mexican-Americans, with their hyphenated identity, are also truly a people in the middle who are often able to see the good, the bad, and the ugly on both sides of the cultural border.<sup>20</sup> People of mixed heritage are neither here nor there, and in both places at the same time, and thus serve as mediators between both cultures while defying rigid categorization by either culture. They eat tacos and burgers, play soccer and football, and watch both *telenovelas* (Latin soap operas) and sitcoms.<sup>21</sup> The hyphenated identity of the US Hispanic has always been the normal way of life.

Hispanics represent a spectrum of bicultural identity and bilingual ability. The United States is the place where second- and third-generation Hispanics become comfortable with English, and is also the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world where Spanish is not the official language.<sup>22</sup> To add complexity, US Hispanics can speak, think, and even advertise in “Spanglish.” A coupon from a laundromat in St. Louis invites me to its website “washateria.com,” a Spanglish word that likely takes the word *lavandería* in Spanish, which means laundromat (or literally, washing place), and then replaces its verbal root “lavar” with the English “to wash.” We move from *lavandería* to *wash-andería* to *washateria*. Such mixing of languages puzzles English and



Spanish speakers alike. An oddity. Mestizaje.

Latin Americans like Octavio Paz criticize Spanglish as a form of North-American pollution making its way into Latin America, where Spanish stands as the last prized identity marker in a globalized world and where the United States is seen as having too much influence.<sup>23</sup> English speakers up North criticize Spanglish as Spanish pollution making its way into the United States, where all people should be speaking “American” anyway. Neither side of the border wishes to acknowledge that, while people generally expect their intellectuals to know proper language rules, at least before they bend them, languages naturally evolve and obtain local nuances overtime. The stories of the English and Spanish languages bear witness to verbal miscegenation, but also to the desire for unification through language.

Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow argue that one of the enduring characteristics of the Spanish language has been its strong impetus, from the thirteenth century to the present, towards establishing a standard use. Alfonso X, medieval king of Castile, began the process of making an oral Castilian dialect, a backwoods tongue in the Iberian Peninsula, a reputable written language almost on par with Latin and Arabic.<sup>24</sup> He did so by overseeing the funding and editing of the translation of classic works into Castilian. The first European to write a grammar for a vernacular language was Antonio de Nebrija; his *Gramática de la lengua castellana* was published in 1492 as Columbus crossed the ocean blue. Due to Alfonso X’s efforts, Castilian would eventually become an instrument of political unification in a peninsula with a bunch of kingdoms and later on, due to Nebrija’s efforts, a tool of the Spanish Empire.<sup>25</sup> After the colonial period, Andrés Bello, Venezuelan man of letters, also saw language as a tool for the unification of the newly independent nations of the New World.<sup>26</sup> A common standard would serve as a tool for communication among Spanish speakers in their task of nation building. It is in no small measure due to Bello’s contribution that Spanish speakers across the Americas can understand each other despite the varieties of local colloquialisms and regionalisms.

There is, however, a counterbalance to the story of linguistic unity in the history of Spanish—an embellished chord in a somewhat unison melody. And that is the role that the Catholic Church played in the Americas in the preservation of indigenous languages or *lenguas generales*. Many of these local languages survive today in part because of the work of missionaries who believed the gospel did not have to be proclaimed and taught only in Castilian categories. Spanish co-existed with other languages, and mixed with them. As we said before, Spain soon incorporated terms from *lenguas generales* into its dictionaries. Diversity did not become an obstacle to linguistic unity. Today, the push for a General Spanish as a reference for global communication in an increasingly interconnected society has become one of the main goals of the *Real Academia Española*. And yet this institutional defender of the Spanish language has developed over time, and in consultation with the language academies of Spanish-speaking countries, a *Diccionario de americanismos*, that is, a dictionary that highlights the dialectal uniqueness of Latin American Spanish. Nadeau and Barlow call this “double desire” for affirming local particularity and global community “a fascinating contradiction: the

same people who work on defining General Spanish also produce a differential work that celebrates Spanish diversity.”<sup>27</sup> They offer the perceptive words of Alfredo Matus Olivier, the director of the Chilean Academy, who explained the reason for the dictionary of Americanisms: “Our objective is to create unity in diversity, not uniformity. . . . Our language remains diverse, it is polycentric, but we work on defining what we have in common.”<sup>28</sup>

Spanish has always been a hybrid of Castilian and local languages, in the same way that in the United States English and Spanish have co-existed, intermingled, and borrowed from each other. Spanish words like *fiesta*, *siesta*, *macho*, *poncho*, *pronto*, *patio*, *mano a mano*, *no problema* (from the Spanish, “no hay problema”), and yes, *hasta la vista*, *baby*, have become “English” words and expressions. Moreover, English words like *bills*, *trucks*, and *applications* have morphed respectively into the Spanish-sounding (or Spanglish) words *biles*, *trocas*, and *aplicaciones*—shall we say, the dynamic equivalent of the more formal Spanish terms *cuentas*, *camionetas*, and *solicitudes*. And then, there is that St. Louis *washateria*, where you can wash and dry your clothes. Hispanic can incorporate all these forms of verbal hybridity because its history, language, racial-ethnic composition, and even appropriation of the Christian faith have always been an ongoing exercise in *mestizaje*.

Hispanic identity seeks to reconcile diversity or plurality and unity, local uniqueness, and transcendent commonality. My family is a microcosm of this larger historic reality. The Sánchez Von Behren household is, as the name suggests, hybrid. Hispanic is the Spanish, Amerindian, and Black that run through my blood, mixed with the Irish, German, and Swiss that run through my wife’s blood. Racial and ethnic browning. Latin American blood mixed with North American blood, the heirs of Catholic Spain and Protestant England made one under the altar of Lutheran Wittenberg. Cultural browning with a religious streak. We speak English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Some in the family have been transgressing boundaries by flirting with Portuguese and Japanese. Linguistic browning. Religion, theology, and family devotion are no different. There is browning there too.

The Christmas celebration of *Las Posadas* (meaning *lodging* or *inn*), a reenactment of the journey of Mary and Joseph seeking a place for baby Jesus—a practice with roots in the medieval Spanish *villancico* (or Christmas carol), contextualized by Aztecs and Mexicans in the New World—has now been evangelically appropriated by many Lutherans (Hispanics and others as well) in the United States. In the Christmas season, present-day pilgrims accompany the Holy Family as they are rejected by various innkeepers, until finally an innkeeper opens the doors and receives gladly the Holy Family and God’s visitation in Christ. *Las Posadas* are a profound Hispanic theological and liturgical reflection on faith, redemption, and hospitality. An example of faithful theological *mestizaje*. In my household, we fused the North’s St. Nick’s tradition with the South’s Kings’ Day celebration into one Epiphany moment. The Kings or Magi now bring their gifts to our children on January the sixth, filling their St. Nick’s stockings with chocolates, fruits, and other goodies. A hybrid theological devotion at the household on the themes of divine giftedness, revelation, generosity, and mission as our



family journeys with Jesus from Christmas into Epiphany. Faithful, gospel-centered, theological mestizaje is possible. It is possible to be Latino/Hispanic and Lutheran.

### Implications for an Increasingly Global Church

I have shown how the question of Hispanic identity in relationship to Europe and the United States has been a central concern of Latin American and US Hispanic intellectuals since the nineteenth century. I have also shown that wrestling with this question has meant finding ways of striking a balance between plurality and unity, the dual intention to foster local particularity and global community.

In their racial, ethnic, linguistic, political, and religious life, Latin Americans and Hispanics have rejected both attempts at unity in the form of homogeneity or abstract uniformity, as well as diversity without a concern for a meaningful and more transcendent communion. Generally speaking, they have rejected translation of foreign models without critical reception, adaptation, or revision at the local level, as well as particularity and uniqueness without concern for a more global awareness, commitment, engagement, and contribution. I suggested some bad and good examples of striking a proper integration between these poles of identity in the life of the church.

What other lessons does the quest for Hispanic identity have for the Christian church, and Lutherans in particular? I will end with two lessons that are especially critical as we engage, and hopefully become, an increasingly global church—particularly in the United States.

First, the Hispanic experience of mestizaje reminds the Christian church of her own *catholic* identity in the world. We might say that Hispanic mestizaje is a sign—though an imperfect one, for sure—of the catholicity of the church. When using the term *mestizo*, however, we are deeply aware of its dark side. As Hispanic Canadian theologian Néstor Medina reminds us, Latin American independence movements led by mestizo elites often exploited indigenous and African populations.<sup>29</sup> The myth of the ideal Latino/a prototype, a light-skinned hispano mestizo down there, or a darker-looking Hispanic one up here, is still around. During a summer internship as a student assistant at the Panama Canal, I met a co-worker who was at least a third-generation Panamanian-Chinese man. The mestizos called him by the ethnic slur *chino*, but he was quick to point out that he was *panameño*. Chinese immigration to Panama began in the late nineteenth century, but mestizo co-workers chose to draw attention to this man's otherness rather than his commonality with them. Highlighting difference in this case did not lead to community but alienation. Old habits, colonial habits, are hard to break.

Though imperfect, we use the term *mestizo* in a broader sense in order to point to a fuller catholic reality, one that defines the church's unity and communion, giving its universality an embracing character inclusive of people from different ethnicities, races, languages, and tribes, with different gifts and theological contributions. A communion that transcends without disembodiment. As an expression of that reality, the Hispanic church is Amerindian, African, Asian, European, and a mix of all of the above. Hispanic is not what you think! Hispanic has really never been an ethnic minor-

ity rigidly and myopically conceived a la Nixon, but rather a global reality that thrives on catholicity. That is the story of the Hispanic, both secular and ecclesial.

Theologically, from a Lutheran perspective, *mestizaje* is not a sign (Lat. *signum*) in the evangelical and sacramental sense, namely, a sign that delivers or communicates God's grace or forgiveness. Rather, *mestizaje* is a sign in the catechetical sense, namely, a sign that though not instituted and commanded by God as a means of grace, nevertheless serves to admonish and teach folks a key dimension of their identity under the word of God. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession allows for both uses of the term *sign*, allowing us to articulate a theology of the sign that includes both sacramental giftedness and catechetical instruction.<sup>30</sup> In catechetical terms, the historic experience of *mestizaje* can be seen, more broadly, as a sign that embodies, gives meaning, and deepens our understanding of an important aspect of the church's identity, namely, its catholic or universal character.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of our life together, this means that Hispanic is not a sign pointing to a diverse group in an already established church, a nice garnish to an already constituted reality. Instead, Hispanic is a full local expression of the church catholic. Moreover, because of its own history of *mestizaje*, Hispanic is a sign that calls all people to catholicity. As Latina theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernandez once put it: "We are not your diversity, we are the church!"<sup>32</sup> She argues for moving beyond the language of difference and towards dealing with diversity through the lens of commonality, hybridity, and belonging. While commonality could end up in homogenization and a denial of embodied particularity, drawing attention to difference and hybridity as ends in themselves could lead to isolation or ghettoization without solidarity and community building. Therefore, she calls instead for "an expanded understanding of hybridity as multiple belonging," one which "is grounded in a shared humanity and derived from creation in the divine image," and in which we do not become fused into the other but "search for intersections and connections."<sup>33</sup> For Lutherans, this common human thirst for "multiple belonging" displays the human need for justification, which only God can address by making sinners turned inwardly (Lat. *incurvatus in se*) into children turned outwardly in faith towards God and in love toward one another.

Second, the Hispanic experience of *mestizaje* reminds the Christian church in the world of her *intercultural* identity. We have shown that, from the beginning, Hispanic identity has been not a homogenous reality, but rather, and to various degrees of success, a multi-, cross-, and intercultural reality. The Hispanic experience reminds the church that, in her mission, she strives to move beyond mere multicultural thinking towards richer cross-cultural and intercultural discourses and practices. Citing Cuban-German philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Medina argues that *mestizaje* must be seen from the perspective of interculturality, which "seeks to promote interchange among cultural groups rather than absolutizing."<sup>34</sup> We have shown how Spanish and North American absolutizing attempts to make Latin Americans and Hispanics respectively after their own image have generally been met with a double dose of rejection.

The term *multicultural* has its limits. The most it can do is to make cultures aware of each other's presence. Awareness of the other is a starting point, but demands

little to no engagement among and with the other. We end up with people who stand by each other as two parallel lines, like two worlds that see each other from afar but never intersect. If the story of the Hispanic is a collision of cultures, then, the lines at some point intersect.

The term *cross-cultural* has its merits. It demands a bit more effort than awareness by calling people to cross into another's culture, usually learning about or understanding the other and at times sharing one's gifts. Border crossing is an apt image to get at the reality of moving beyond one's cultural comfort zone into another's world. The crossing happens on one side, or comes from both sides, but it can often be—practically speaking—unilateral in that one side typically sees itself as being the main contributor in the exchange. The story of the Hispanic offers many examples of border crossing; nevertheless, in many instances this meant a power differential on one side that, upon entering the world of the other, attempted to make the other side a dependent and passive recipient of its cultural patrimony.

*Intercultural* thinking moves us more clearly to mutual, interdependent engagement. It is the most demanding form of engagement. Interculturality moves beyond recognition of the other's presence and learning about the other towards joint collaboration with the other whenever possible. Like an effective sports team, intercultural engagement uses the gifts and strengths of each partner or player in developing a common project or vision, avoiding the danger of unilateral border crossings. Think of a partnership, perhaps like a marriage, where each member, while retaining his or her uniqueness, nurtures the other, and where both partners develop their relationship over ongoing, sustained, creative, and faithful engagement. Partners are critical and constructive of each other, but they also seek to build something of value together. We have a model that, while taking into account particularity, works toward common values and community.

Interculturality raises some questions as we engage global South Christians out there and here in the United States. How much of our engagement is one-sided, that is, focused primarily on our theological contributions to global South neighbors? By contrast, how much of our engagement is focused on what we can learn from *their* theological reflections, mission practices, and ministries of mercy and justice? In short, how do we move from cross-cultural to intercultural engagement, that is, from crossing into another's culture with our toolbox of gifts to collaborating with people of other cultures in joint projects that foster mutual learning and incorporation of global contributions to Lutheranism into our sermons, Bible studies, devotional practices, visual and musical arts, approaches to mercy/justice, course syllabi, and theological scholarship? How do we fulfill, live out, and indeed reclaim the promise of Lutheranism as a truly global, catholic, or universal church in the world for the sake of the world?

In Latin America and the United States, that hybrid oddity called Latino Lutheran down there or Hispanic Lutheran up here should not have really been that strange a specimen at all, given the mixed identity of our people, and their historic struggle with and desire for living out their particularity while seeking commonality. Rather, the problem down there and up here has been our limited imaginary, parochial

outlook, ethnocentricity, or shyness to claim what was really ours from the beginning. The Hispanic experience dares us—all Christians—to be ourselves again, to claim anew our identity in Jesus Christ in that church that, as we confess in the Creed, is both one and catholic.

“Latino and Lutheran? That’s impossible!” Not really. Hispanic can make room for Lutheran. But can Lutheran make room for Hispanic? The current demographics of the Lutheran church across the Americas say “no.” But I have heard minority reports that dare to say “yes.” And these reports, these proleptic glimpses of the New Jerusalem, give us some reason for hope.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rodriguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, 105.

<sup>3</sup> The creation of the Center for Hispanic Studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and its predecessor the Hispanic Institute of Theology, is the result of resolutions mandated by the 1973 (Res 6-22), 1975 (Res 6-10), 1977 (Res 10-03, Res 10-09A), 1979 (Res 6-10A), 1981 (Res 6-08A), and 1983 (Res 6-15B) Conventions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). In all resolutions since 1973, the term “Hispanic” predominates. In a 1967 resolution, the term “Spanish-Americans” is used. In a 1962 resolution, reference is made to “Spanish-speaking people.” My thanks to Michael Dobler for his research assistance.

<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez, *Brown*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall C. Eakin, *The History of Latin America: Collision of Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 253–255.

<sup>7</sup> On the differences between both movements, see *ibid.*, 204–206.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 399–409; Eakin notes, however, that several attempts towards an “American” rather than “Iberian” identity are evident already in the 19th century. *Ibid.*, 255–265.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *The Story of Spanish* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffith, 2013), 215.

<sup>10</sup> Eakin, *History of Latin America*, 398–399.

<sup>11</sup> Alfredo Castillero Calvo, “Color y movilidad social,” in Alfredo Castillero Calvo, ed. *Historia General de Panamá*, vol. 1/I (Panama City: Comité Nacional del Centenario de la República de Panamá, 2004), 285–312.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqbUY3mCGjA> (accessed April 27, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> For some examples see Nadeau and Barlow, *The Story of Spanish*, 121–124.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent example, see the 2012 Ricardo Miró award-winning essay on the influence of the Black colonial presence in Panamanian Spanish. Porfirio Sánchez Fuentes, *Presencia africana en el habla del panameño: estudio sociolingüístico del negro colonial*. Colección Ricardo Miró, Premio ensayo (Panamá: Editorial Mariano Arosemena/ Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad y otras obras* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> For the original account, see Gregory Klotz, “Dealing with Culture in Theological Formation: A Former Missionary in Latin America Reflects on Training Pastors and Communicating the Gospel,” *Concordia Journal* 38 no. 3 (2012): 250, 257–258.

<sup>17</sup> Ilan Stavans, “Hispanic USA: literature, music, and language,” in John King, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 320.

<sup>18</sup> Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*. 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> In previous articles, I have reflected to various degrees on the significance of the Galilean location of theology for Lutheran theology and mission. See Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Toward an Ecclesiology of Catholic Unity and Mission in the Borderlands: Reflections from a Lutheran Latino Theologian,” *Concordia Journal* 35 no. 1 (2009): 17–34; “The Global South Meets North America: Confessional Lutheran Identity In Light of Changing Christian Demographics,” *Concordia Journal* 37 no. 1 (2011): 39–56; and “Can Anything Good Come Out of \_\_\_\_? Come and See! Faithful Witness in Marginality and Hospitality,” *Concordia Journal* 41 no. 2 (2015): 111–123.

<sup>21</sup> For a visual representation of US Hispanic hybridity, see the Univision's video "The New American Reality." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQnhuj11zgI> (accessed April 27, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> In the United States, 37 million people speak Spanish as a native language, 15 million speak Spanish as a second language or with limited proficiency, and 6 million learn Spanish as a foreign language. See Nadeau and Barlow, *The Story of Spanish*, 388–389.

<sup>23</sup> "Once asked by a reporter for his opinion on el espanglés [Spanglish] . . . Octavio Paz . . . is said to have responded: 'ni es bueno ni es malo, sino abominable' (It isn't correct or incorrect, it's awful)." Cited in Stavans, "Hispanic USA," 328.

<sup>24</sup> Nadeau and Barlow, *The Story of Spanish*, 67–77.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 106–115.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 219–231.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latino Catholicism. Studies in Latino Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> I first argued for the missiological potential of a Lutheran distinction between two kinds of signs in Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case," *Concordia Journal* 38 no. 3 (2012): 211–213.

<sup>31</sup> For a recent application of a Lutheran theology of signs, see Sánchez, "Can Anything Good Come Out of \_\_\_\_\_?"

<sup>32</sup> Carmen Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish: Context, Community, and Ministry. Studies in Latino Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 1–20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 18–19.

<sup>34</sup> Medina, *Mestizaje*, 132.



# HOMILETICAL HELPS

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### Proper 16 • Luke 13:22–30 • August 21, 2016

This focus of this text is about the baptized, to “those who are being saved”; verse 23 uses a present participle that identifies the hearer for whom salvation has already come. An individual in the crowd is curious, or speculating about the salvation of others and asks, “Lord will those who are saved be few?” Jesus doesn’t take the bait. Speculative questions about whether others will be saved avoid the uncomfortable questions about one’s own spiritual life. Jesus directs the hearer inward, towards a personal assessment as a baptized child of God. “Am I putting my faith into practice?” “Does my faith actually influence my daily life?” “Do I care about my neighbor?” “Am I striving to enter through the narrow door?” Jesus uses an imperative, “Strive [and struggle continuously] to enter through the narrow door.” Jesus uses strong language here, taken from the ancient athletic contests where athletes push themselves in training, exerting themselves towards the goal. In this same way, Jesus’s words address the baptized who are already saved, calling them to take seriously the gift received, and to earnestly engage the task of sanctification.

Throughout the sermon, the *sola gratia* needs to be emphasized. Christians are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Jesus fully accomplished salvation through his death and resurrection on the cross. Jesus is speaking about what happens after one is justified, the basis upon how daily life is lived. Melancthon put it this way, “Love and good works must also follow faith” because “God has commanded them in order to exercise our faith” (AC IV. 74, 189).

The malady is a mindset that God loves and accepts us just the way we are, and therefore, we don’t have to live a holy, good life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase “cheap grace” that one takes sin for granted and ignores any spiritual concern for holy living. It should be remembered that holy living and good works are not limited to the hearers’ vertical relationship with God, although that is primary. “Strive to enter the narrow door” includes striving on the horizontal realm, that is, being concerned about the salvation and welfare of our neighbor.

“Don’t wait, or it might be too late” summarizes Jesus’s warning in verses 25–29. The master does not recognize those not striving, even though they “ate and drank” in his presence. This is emphasized when the master states he doesn’t even know where they came from. The Jews in the crowd felt that they were God’s chosen people who “ate and drank” in his presence and listened to Jesus speak (v. 26), yet they were rejected (v. 27). Baptism is not a modern indulgence, a guaranteed reservation at heaven’s banquet table that gives license for one to ignore God and his commands during earthly life. Recall Melancthon’s words above.

The final verse (30) punctuates these warnings, “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” Too often, this phrase is understood to describe a continuum of believers, where both the first and the last will be at the eschatologi-

cal banquet. On the contrary, Jesus's words are a warning that some of those who are first may not even have a place at the table (v. 28). When working on this section of scripture, Martin Luther commended: "It is to frighten the greatest saints"<sup>1</sup> But there is gospel here, for "some of the last shall be first." The salvation we receive comes from who we are in Christ, not upon what we have done. This is good news for all who are striving to live out their faith towards the narrow door.

Jeffrey Thormodson

<sup>1</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946), 755.

### Proper 17 • Luke 14:1–14 • August 28, 2016

"They were watching him carefully." Luke observes that the Pharisees kept a close eye on Jesus. They watched him so they could witness him violating the Sabbath and expose him to the people as a law breaker. They brought a man with edema (retention of water and swelling that was a symptom of something more serious) hoping that Jesus would heal him and transgress the Sabbath law. Their watching was not with wonder at the miracle Jesus could do, but with evil intent to tempt him, trap him, and accuse him.

Jesus poses a question to the Pharisees that is similar to one he had asked earlier (Lk 6:9) "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Or to put it another way, does Jesus have the authority to heal on the Sabbath? Not wanting to be caught in a trap, the Pharisees were reduced to silence and Jesus healed the man. Jesus follows this miracle with another question, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" Jesus makes it clear to the Pharisees that his orientation toward the Sabbath is different from theirs. For Jesus, healing a man with a disease or saving a life was beyond debate. He teaches them that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). Again, the response of the Pharisees is silence.

Robert Sorenson makes this point in his commentary on Luke,

By means of another Sabbath healing, Jesus exposes His enemies' misunderstanding of God's will as expressed in the Law. Today, we are similarly tempted to shape our religious practices according to our own whims and desires and then to condemn those who disagree. But Jesus teaches the primacy of love. He places the well-being of God's children above all. He reaches out in mercy and calls us to do the same.<sup>1</sup>

The willingness of Jesus to eat in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees demonstrates his love for all people. He continues this encounter with two short parables. Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach both the guests and the host an important lesson in how to show love.

He instructs the guests about humility (vv. 7–11). Overestimating one's importance can be both offensive and embarrassing. Sorenson suggests this spiritual application: "When we get out of place by acting haughtily, we not only offend a more deserving neighbor but also the Lord, who has established each in his own station."<sup>2</sup>

He then instructs the hosts to be hospitable and kind by inviting to the banquet those who are not able to reciprocate (vv. 12–14). By this act of unselfishness to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind the hosts are blessed. That is how it is in the kingdom of God. Jesus says that they will be repaid for their unselfish act of kindness "at the resurrection of the righteous." These acts of kindness do not merit righteousness and salvation, but are a response of faith. The Lord acknowledges the fruits of faith and gives mercy and grace.

### Suggested Outline

The preacher has the opportunity to invite his hearers to "Watch Jesus Closely." The focus is on Jesus who first loved us and gives us the privilege of stewarding that love to others.

1. The Pharisees were watching Jesus closely with evil intent. (Mk 3:2)
2. We watch Jesus closely with eyes of faith following him and learning from him. (Heb 12:2)
3. We watch Jesus closely and love others as he first loved us in humility and unselfishness. (Mic 6:8) (Mt 25:40)

Wayne J. Knolhoff

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Sorensen, *Luke*, Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 257.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

### Proper 18 • Luke 14:25–35 • September 4, 2016

It is perhaps impossible to read this text and not be struck by the use of the word hate. Some commentators suggest this is a Hebraism, and should be interpreted as implying preference. The Greek word μισέω, however, is best translated as hate or its synonym and not merely as a lesser form of love. It's usage throughout the New Testament in general, and Luke in particular gives no reason to interpret this as an idiom. Indeed, the only evidence to suggest μισέω might have other connotations is the reader's need to soften the shocking implications of Jesus's statement. There is a wish to change "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" into good news: "Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters,

and themselves as well.” The desire to do this is understandable. It has only been four chapters since Jesus confirmed the summation of the law was to love God and love neighbor, only to follow that with a parable that radically pushes open the boundaries for that love of neighbor. In the face of this, let alone the rest of Jesus’s teachings, it seems absurd to suggest that Jesus is calling us to hate our loved ones.

It is important to note that verse 26 is not a good summation of this pericope. The use of the word *hate* is not a call to not love our father, mother, wife and children; it is not a call to harm our family, or wish them ill; it is a call to heed the radical nature of the call Jesus places on those who would follow him, to count the cost and to realize “any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (32). This is a theme that has been building throughout Luke’s account of the ministry of Jesus. There is a very real cost to being a follower of Jesus. It will cost the entirety of your being (9:23–27). There is not time to go back and bury the dead (9:60), no time to say farewell (9:61). The cost of discipleship is nothing less than a complete breach with the things of this world. And what are the things of this world if not our father, mother, wife, and children? Does this mean that we can have no relationship with our mothers and fathers, our sister and brothers? No, as we look to the teachings of Jesus on what it means to follow him we see that it would be impossible to follow him and not have deep meaningful relationships, but it does mean that our relationships are transformed by our relationship with Christ. Our relationships with everyone from family to neighbor, happen in light of—because of—our relationship with Christ. And this relationship, we are assured, will cause discord. Christ promised, repeatedly, that persecution will come to those who follow him; there will be those in the world, those who are counted as friends, and those who are family who will reject us—that is the cost of following Jesus.

This pericope serves as a warning to those who would follow Jesus to take seriously the cost. The two examples in the center of this discourse emphasize this (vv. 28–32). It is best not to think of these as parables. They are less stories, and more examples to be quickly related to. The nature of Jesus’s question is rhetorical. The obvious answer in both examples is, no one would do that. And so Jesus says to anyone who would follow him, recognize what it will cost. Jesus then leaves his hearers with one final image in verses 34–35 to emphasize the point. There is no in-between with salt. Salt is either salty or it isn’t. There is no “sort of” salty. If it isn’t salty it isn’t really salt and it should be thrown away. Its identity is its property and its property is its identity. In the same way one is either a disciple of Jesus, or one isn’t; there is no “sort of” disciple.

A sermon on this pericope will likely center on the cost of following Jesus. The sermon may use the passage as an outline; or the sermon may explore the very real implications for Christian living in today’s world.

Jason Broge

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

The parables of the “lost” in Luke 15—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—are perhaps the most well-known parables of Jesus. They are the most well known, but in recent times they have been used in a rather odd fashion: you will know it immediately. When Christians speak of “the lost” they are almost always referring to those outside the church. The phrase is used especially when talking about mission and evangelism. The church—it is said—is to seek “the lost.” To be missional is to focus our efforts beyond the walls of our church, beyond the people here gathered and toward the reaching of “the lost.” Rather than “preach to the choir” or concern ourselves only with “the ninety-nine,” a church that is faithful to its mission must foster a “zeal for the lost,” so that “our hearts would feel a burden for the lost.”

On the one hand, this gives expression to something very important, namely, that Christians need to lift our gaze to those who are hurting, to those who need to hear the gospel. Too often the church gets stuck looking inward, directing all its efforts toward the self-sufficiency of its own community rather than seeing and living outward. We are called into a sacrificial, self-emptying existence, looking always to those who are in need, those who are suffering, those who are . . . *lost*. The problem, however, is that when the phrase is used in this way we can draw the line in a strange, and arguably, dangerous place.

Consider why Jesus is telling these parables. These parables are the answer to the grumbling of the Pharisees and the scribes who are offended that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. And so the “lost” in the parable—the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son—are clearly these people that are drawing near to hear Jesus—these tax collectors and sinners, whose repentance brings joy into the heavenly places. And who are the “ninety-nine”? Who are those that Jesus leaves behind? They are the “righteous persons who need no repentance.” They are the Pharisees and the scribes, of course—these that grumble against Jesus’s association with the lost. These parables are set to condemn them, to make their grumbling stick in their throats.

So, consider the implication: the line between the lost sheep and the ninety-nine, the lost coin and the other nine is not between Christians and non-Christians, between church and unchurched—unless of course we are to conceive of all our members as Pharisees and scribes who think they need no repentance (I wouldn’t suggest it). The line is set between those who, on the one hand, draw near to hear Jesus, who repent, those who need Jesus, those with whom Jesus chooses to have fellowship; and, on the other hand, those who have no need of Jesus, have no need to repent, and are secure in their own righteousness. We make a serious error when we speak as if that line simply divides church members from non-members. It is a strange ecclesiology (perhaps a profoundly arrogant one) that asserts that we can know who is “in” and who is “out” of

the church—that we can identify who are “lost” and who are “found.” To the contrary, Jesus continually challenges any attempt to label and categorize people for the sake of governing our attitude toward them. Thus, when the lawyer asked Jesus earlier “who is my neighbor?”—Jesus would not allow him to use the label on others and instead, through the parable of the Good Samaritan, answered: you are the neighbor, you go be the neighbor, so that everyone is an object of your love.

So it is here, that we are not to draw lines and categorize—“us” and “them,” “churched” and “unchurched,” “in-reach” and “outreach”—we are to repent and then to stand alongside the world—not over against it—and bear witness to this Jesus who has come only for sinners—he has given himself *for us all*. Only then will the world be able to look at the church and begin to see in our midst “this man who receives sinners and eats with them.”

Erik Herrmann

## Proper 20 • Luke 16:1–15 • September 18, 2016

### Justice God’s Way

I began to study this text rather carefully on tax day, April 15. Especially in that context, the theme of accounting surfaced in my mind almost instantaneously as I read along. Thoughts about managing wealth, budgeting, income and spending, and claiming deductions on tax returns could not be disregarded. (Similar considerations might have relevance for preaching this text assigned for the weekend close to the September 15 quarterly tax payment due date!)

Study bibles including the American Edition of the Greek New Testament classify this text as the parable of the ‘Unjust Manager’ / the ‘Dishonest Steward.’ If so, how should this part of the teachings of Jesus be understood and what lessons for life could be drawn from this narrative? Questions arise on where exactly in these verses the parable part actually ends and its application for life begins. Our analysis operates on the assumption that the illustrative story ends with verse 7 and verse 8 is a transitional verse, inviting the reader to follow along and figure out what Jesus wants understood from it. This way of reading the text helps to come to grips with Jesus’s intentionality for his hearers, especially his disciples and the Pharisees who were crowding around during much of his public ministry, looking for opportunities to level charges against Jesus as a false teacher and a lawbreaker.

In the first part of verse 8, the steward, uncommitted to his vocation as he was, receives from the estate owner commendation for the shrewdness with which he handled a delicate situation. Ever mindful of the predicament he brought upon himself consequent on the deliberate mismanagement of his master’s wealth, the manager conjures up a way for making friends who might rescue him when he would be in trouble. He foresaw that his misconduct in his official position will cost him his job and jeopardize his future living as the business owner gets to know all about his misdemeanors.

Presuming that he will soon be fired, he wanted to secure his future by befriending numerous clients who have been falling short of paying their dues to the estate owner's investment. Contradicting the custom laws of the time the steward offered the debtors significant and disproportionate reductions negatively impacting the business owner's assets and net gain.

From that point on the text reads like a catalog of universal truths, lined up one after another, each statement making good sense even if read independently of the other. The reader however is bound to engage the text holistically and understand their meaning cumulatively and chart the course for daily living in God's kingdom that distinguishes itself in sharp contradistinction to the patterns of behavior in "the present evil age" (cf. Gal 1:4). Jesus challenges his listeners with the question that if the worldly wise appear to be more prudent and intelligent in handling matters pertaining to this world, how much more shrewdly should the children of light be living, demonstrating in word and deed in this world that they are indeed citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

A certain sense of discernment and sensitivity is required of the people of God as they strive to live out their God-given righteousness in a broken world bereft of equality, justice, and peace. St. Luke's Gospel is conscious of the dilemma the poor, the oppressed, the widows, and the destitute face, and how vulnerable they are in a fallen world, susceptible to being isolated, left behind, and uncared for. For example, the narrative that follows our text in Luke 16 contrasts the life of a wealthy man and Lazarus his counterpart, a beggar who was laid at his gate longing to satisfy his hunger with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's dinner table. According to Luke, the destiny of those who put their trust exclusively in their wealth (mammon) rather than in God, and ignore the cause of the poor neighbor in need is frightening (16:19–31). The appointed reading from Amos 8:4–7 addresses a similar socio-economic issue so graphically. The prophet decries the injustices the affluent inflict on the poor and those who might be at the low end of the social ladder. Businesses that sold grain shrunk the bushel baskets and increased the cost of basic commodities, mixed wheat with husks and cheated the customer with dishonest scales. The unfortunate ones were deprived of their true human identity and devalued less than a pair of sandals. Against the depravation the prophet raised a clarion call for all people to live dignified lives and enjoy justice, peace, and righteousness attuned to the divine design for humanity (Am 5:4).

A similar scenario surfaces in our text as Jesus confronts the pharisaic legalism of his opponents, especially that of the teachers of the law. Jesus calls them lovers of money (15:14), The Pharisees put on a show for the public to notice their piety, while their hearts are far removed from the actual intent of God's revelation. They pay their tithes on spices such as mint, dill, and cumin, but neglect the weightier matters of the law such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Mt 23: 23). They pretend to follow the letter of the law yet circumvent the spirit of the law. The Pharisees, the presumed protectors of the law, built a fence around the law by establishing rules and regulations that would presumably simplify its obedience. By doing so however they became a law unto themselves and blind to the law's ultimate purpose of leading each person to Jesus the Savior. Jesus came to this world to fulfill God's law in its entirety to its minutest detail.



St. Paul spoke of Jesus as “the end of the law” signifying that those who come to faith in Jesus as Savior have the curse of the law lifted from them before God on account of Christ (Rom 10:4). Jesus himself demonstrated before the people that he came on earth to fulfill the law and not to abolish it (Mt 5:17).

It is therefore significant that the Lord addresses this parabolic saying directly to the disciples, the insiders of his kingdom (16:1). If the followers of Jesus were to learn a lesson from the shrewdness of the worldly wise overseer of another’s property, it is that they cannot at the same time serve God and money. The people of God cannot remain forever neutral to their relationship to the wealth God has entrusted them. Elevating money to the level that is solely God’s tilts the equilibrium of life and finds humanity wanting in anything they are called upon to accomplish in Christ’s name. As Paul counsels, those who are eager for money wander from faith and pierce themselves with many griefs (1 Thes 6:10).

As children of the Light of the world (1 Thes 5:5; Eph 5:8; Jn 12:36), the followers of Jesus let the Light from above shine through them as they live and act as faithful stewards of the treasures of the heavenly kingdom, while on earth carefully and faithfully managing the material blessings God has invested in them for their own wellbeing and for contributing generously to the security and welfare especially of the less privileged and those who struggle to make life’s ends meet. At Jesus’s coming, the kingdom of God has come into our world. As we share Christ with others through our words and actions, Christ will rule and reign in their hearts as well.

Victor Raj

### **Proper 21 • Luke 16:19–31 • September 25, 2016**

It is interesting to look at different paintings inspired by this Bible story. The rich man is surrounded by friends and servants and tables furnished with food, and his gaze is fixed on one of his friends or on an alluring woman or on the platters of food. Poor Lazarus is surrounded by dogs and often pictured with his eyes toward heaven or with his hands folded in prayer. One artist paints the scene from outside the house. The rich man is going up the front steps with a bag of money in each hand, and his eyes are turned down, looking right at the moneybags. Lazarus, in this same painting, is lying on the ground below, half-dead, and his tired eyes are turned in their sockets, looking up to heaven.

Jesus’s story of the rich man and Lazarus warns us against greed and loveless ease, but ultimately this story summons us to trust in God’s help in the midst of life’s troubles, to listen to his Scriptures, and to set our hearts on the joy and comfort of his coming kingdom. It calls us, then, to love our neighbor—even, and especially, when our neighbor is in pain and poverty. It calls us to love and trust in our God and in his promises. And it warns us to beware the love of money, which might turn us away from our neighbor and from our God.



Jesus does not name the rich man; he is merely “a certain man (who) was rich” (ἄνθρωπος . . . τις ἦν πλούσιος, v. 19). In contrast, Jesus calls the beggar by name—“a certain poor man named Lazarus” (πτωχὸς . . . τις ὀνόματι Λάζαρος, v. 20). This implies not only divine familiarity and care for Lazarus, but also the poor man’s trust in God, since *Lazarus* is a Greek form of the Hebrew name *Eliezer*, which means, “My God (*Eli*) is my help (*ezer*).”

Lazarus lived in misery, but at his death, God’s angels carry him to a place of blessed comfort, together with Abraham and the saints. The rich man lived sumptuously, but at his death he goes to Hades. Abraham denies his request for even a few drops of water, explaining: “Child, remember that you received your good things (τὰ ἀγαθὰ, sou) during your life, and Lazarus, on the contrary, bad things (τὰ κακά), but *now* he is comforted *here*, and you are tormented” (v. 25).

Such a reversal does not imply a causal relationship: not all those blessed with good things in this life are therefore tormented in the next, nor are all those burdened with bad things in this life for that reason comforted in the next. The point, rather, is that what ultimately matters are not the passing things of this age, but rather the blessed comfort or agonizing torment of the age to come. For that which comes last lasts. The blessed inheritance of those who trust in Christ is final and permanent. Lazarus suffered greatly in the here-and-now of his daily life, but from the standpoint of the coming age, all this is past and “now” (after death) and “here” (among the eternally blessed in the presence of God) he has found comfort (v. 25).

Jesus tells this story as a warning to the Pharisees—and to us—for like the Pharisees, we love the “good things” of this life: earthly honor (Lk 11:43) and wealth (Lk 16:14). It is not wrong to ask God for our daily bread, and to receive the blessings of this life with thanksgiving: health, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, money and goods.

But God has nowhere promised us constant bounty or uninterrupted ease in this life. He has not promised us honor and recognition in the world’s eyes. He has not promised us fine clothes. Sometimes his people are clothed with sores and sickness. Sometimes his people face heartache over their children, disappointment in their retirement years, seeming failure in the pursuit of their dreams, tragic accidents that bring life screeching to a crawl. Sometimes God’s people must endure humiliation. Sometimes they must live as beggars.

What God *has* promised us is that lasting bounty and lasting joy are found in Jesus Christ, in the world to come. This is the testimony of Moses and the Prophets—and of the Gospels and the Epistles, too, for that matter. These Scriptures convey the promises of God, and God does not lie. Whoever turns aside from these divine promises to set his heart instead on earthly pleasures and riches is a fool—in fact, tragically, *a damned fool*.

Whether we are rich or poor, when we die each of us will stand as a beggar before God. The good news is that, in Christ, God makes beggars rich. As St. Paul writes: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

None of us is worthy to ask or inherit anything before God—not the rich man, not Lazarus, not you or me. There is only one who is worthy of riches before God: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Rv 5:12). And Jesus, who alone is worthy, shares this inheritance with all poor, sinful beggars who look to him in faith.

In the Christian church, Jesus makes beggars rich. Not at the bank, not at the mall, but *in God’s house* we find our true prosperity. Here the crucified Savior addresses us in word and in sacrament: You have a place at my side forever. When you lack and worry and fear and weep, look up. Turn your eyes up. All my wealth is yours. I have purchased for you an everlasting kingdom with my blood. Come then, dear beggars, to my altar, and feast sumptuously on my forgiveness. Come wear the fine purple and the linen robes of my righteousness! The days of hurting and hungering are almost ended. The feasting and friendship of my coming kingdom are nearly here. Keep praying, keeping waiting, my beloved beggars. Love your rich neighbors; care for your poor neighbors. I will help you—forever.

So he invites us, and so we come. Week after week, we come . . . and we are as rich as Lazarus!

Thomas Egger

## Proper 22 • Luke 17:1–10 • October 2, 2016

This is a difficult text for Lutherans to hear. We are more comfortable with texts about God’s grace, and being his children and heirs of his promises, but Jesus is prone to saying things that challenge our regular metaphors, and that will increase our faith.

This is also a difficult text for Lutheran pastors to preach, especially since Jesus’s words seem to be more directly aimed at church leaders than to “general parishioners.” Arthur Just, in his 1997 commentary, points out that verses 5–10 are obviously directed at the apostles and their request for more faith, but that even the verses 1–4 imply that Jesus is speaking to disciples who are either already among the seventy(-two) or will be future church leaders. So how does one preach this text, if it is more for the pastor than for the congregation?

A sermon structure could follow the Lord’s Prayer, focusing on certain petitions, especially the first: God’s name is hallowed “Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God’s children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven!” (Small Catechism).

### Sermon Outline

*Opening:* How often and how well do you pray for our congregation and the ministry in which we are serving here together? How often, or how well do you pray for me, and for my preaching and teaching of God’s holy word here? When you do pray for our congregation, how do you do it? What is the focus of your prayer? Do you pray

for various individuals in the congregation, their health, and their personal struggles? If so, great! But do you also pray for us, our whole community of believers who gather here to grow in faith in Jesus, and to lead others to his forgiveness? Let me suggest to you, to all of you, to us, that our prayers for our church might be guided well by a combination of the Lord's Prayer and today's Gospel lesson.

1. We should guard against praying the Lord's Prayer as individuals. Jesus didn't teach the Lord's Prayer individually to Peter or Nicodemus with singular pronouns like "My father who art in heaven" or "Give me this day my daily bread." We can and should pray the Lord's Prayer privately, as part of our individual piety, but should always remember that it is a prayer for the group, for the community, for the church.
2. First Petition and its parallel to Luke 17:1–2. The pastor can emphasize any particular local struggles in teaching God's word "clearly and purely" and living "holy lives according to it."
3. Fifth Petition and its parallel to Luke 17:3–4. The Gospel of Christ's forgiveness for us can be clearly proclaimed here (cf. Mt 18:21–35, Gal– 6:1, as well as other "pay attention" verses like 1 Tm 4:16, Heb 2:1, and/or 2 Pt 1:19).
4. Parallel between Luke 17:5–6 and Luke 11:1 ("Lord, teach us to pray") and the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer. God promises to hear our faithful prayers and answer them (cf. Lk 11:5–13, especially his promise to give the Holy Spirit. Specific local ministry prayers could be suggested. Broader church-wide prayers could also be suggested, including prayers for the seminaries and the next generation of pastors. The Second and Third Petitions may be woven in here.
5. The proper distinction of God as "Our Father" and we his children, but also how we continue as "unworthy servants" (Lk 17:7–10) in our service to him. Explicit gospel can be repeated here as well, with Christ being our worthy Servant. Pastors who realize that they are always in danger of pride in their position (which is all of us) can also ask for their congregation to continue to pray for them to continue as humble servants of Christ who are plowing and planting, keeping the sheep, and dutifully serving the Supper.

Rick Marrs

### **Proper 23 • Luke 17:11–19 • October 9, 2016**

This text speaks to our faith within the context of a changed America, a churching nation in our youth but now a country that gives the church no special privilege. This sermon can probe, perhaps uncomfortably, parishioners' faith, and do so with an eye toward more faithful community outreach.

About the text: The ten lepers who meet Jesus are presumably all Jewish, save for

the Samaritan. The Holiness Code in Leviticus 17–27 taught Jews to keep themselves separate from Gentiles, but here we see that religious rules are set aside when people share a common bond of misery. The ten lepers ask Jesus for mercy, for hands-on physical help for their leprosy. Our Western understanding of mercy is pity for someone who is in a bad way, but biblical mercy means action. “Go and show yourself to the priests,” Jesus responds (v. 14), suggesting he wants the priests to wonder about him. When the lepers discover they have been healed, only the Samaritan returns and “he fell on his face at Jesus’s feet, giving him thanks” (v. 16). Jesus’s response is critical to getting this text right. It’s not that the nine didn’t give thanks; no doubt they were very thankful. The nine were wrong in not seeing Jesus as the personal embodiment of God’s mercies for their need. “Was no one found to return (to the person of Jesus) and give praise to God (present in Jesus) except this foreigner?” (v. 18). “All the promises of God find their yes in him” (2 Cor 1:20).

What does this say to worshippers and congregational life in increasingly unchurched America? The nine lepers who didn’t return were spiritual, calling Jesus “master” and looking to him to dispense a favor; it was all about them. America remains highly spiritual; it’s just that more and more of us claim to be practicing our spirituality apart from the institutional church as “nones.” Like the nine, people today claim to have “faith” but it’s self-centered and self-determined, not the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). In this context, Jesus’s praise for the Samaritan, “Your faith has made you well” has a double meaning—health and salvation. “Your faith” is not the hearer’s subjective feeling but outwardly directed trust in Jesus. “Made you well” (ESV) is the perfect of *sozo* in Greek, “your faith has saved you.” Faith *saves*, makes us well in two ways. Many Americans, like the nine, see faith as a means to a better place in earthly life, with Jesus the master dispenser. Yes, faith does improve our earthly lot. “Every morning mercies new” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 537). But in the double meaning, the deeper meaning is the eternal salvation that Jesus gives to those who trust in him. Like the nine, many spiritual Americans acknowledge Jesus as a “master,” seeking betterment of their temporal situation, but do not bow their broken lives and empty hearts before him. “Was no one found to return except this foreigner?” Might one reason for the decline of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod be that many have been tempted to spirituality apart from devotion to Jesus?

For the sermon you could play on this double meaning of “Your faith has made you well,” contrasting the self-serving spirituality of many Americans to the true church’s outspoken witness to Jesus Christ. A powerful illustration would be to use the story of an ethnic believer, a modern-day Samaritan, who gives thanks and praise because he or she recognizes that God’s mercies have come in the person of Jesus. This gospel is a Great Commission text, “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Like the Samaritan, that starts with Christ-centered personal lives and congregational life, as the epistle pointedly says, “If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tm 2:12).

Dale A. Meyer

## The Persistent Church and the Long-suffering Lord

O Spirit, who didst once restore  
Thy Church that it might be again  
The bringer of good news to men,  
Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more,  
That in these gray and latter days  
There may be those whose life is praise,  
Each life a high doxology  
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.  
(LSB 834, 4)

So Martin Franzmann wrote in his majestic hymn “O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth,” evoking the sweep of salvation history. Franzmann’s hope that “there may be those whose life is praise” parallels the fundamental question that shapes this parable found only in Luke: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (v. 8).

The Lord addresses the question to the church (as the preacher should). The Christian community’s life of faith is really difficult in the world into which the rule and reign of God has come as Jesus makes apparent in Luke 17:20–37 (not in series C). He tells his disciples that “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it” (v. 22). The suffering of faith will be so hard that they will want the Son of Man to come, but his day will not appear. Here is the theology of the cross that the church has no choice but to live if it wants to participate in the rule and reign of God that Jesus brings. In the midst of a world hell-bent on itself, the church is called to live in waiting hope on a Lord whose vindication appears as though it might never come. In these days when evil appears the victor, will the Lord find the faith of the church on the earth?

“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (v. 18:1). The church’s faith will be manifested in a people whose character is like the persistent widow, and whose pleading is dependent upon the long-suffering of the righteous Judge of all. The parable shapes the identity of the people who become the answer to the Lord’s question of what he will find at his coming (Parousia).

The parable expects that the hearer/church will identify with the widow’s persistent wearing out of the unrighteous judge’s ear. As Kenneth Bailey shows, in the Middle Eastern world a woman embodies the powerless and innocent and, unlike a man, she can cry out loudly and belligerently in order to gain a judge’s ear.<sup>1</sup> As Art Just notes, the widow is shameless in her irritating pleading with the judge.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the church should not grow weary of pleading for the Lord’s vindication.

So Jesus says to his people, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says: ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming’” (vv. 4–5).

The judge is unrighteous because he is shameless before God, since he does not fear God, and before people, since he does not respect or care for people. He relents only out of personal self-interest.

But the parable contrasts this unrighteous judge with the righteous God. If the unrighteous judge relents, even more so will the righteous God hear his people's crying in these latter days and vindicate them with his justice. God is not like the righteous judge in his long-suffering (μακροθυμew) grace and mercy. God puts away his anger against his sinful children for a long time. Kenneth Bailey indicates that this is in direct contrast with Ben Sirach 35:15–19 where God's judgement against the Gentiles is enacted with quick ferocity. Instead, in Jesus's parable the Lord sets aside his wrath against all his sinful people.

Ultimately God's setting aside of his wrath is how God acts in his Son, Jesus Christ. As Kenneth Bailey indicates, the passion and death of Jesus raises the question of whether God will vindicate him. The answer, of course, is yes. "God will vindicate his Son who also prays to Him day and night, but that vindication *will be seen in resurrection and will come by way of a cross.*"<sup>3</sup> So it will be for his followers. The Lord will vindicate his church through the cross and resurrection and when he does so he will do it quickly!

Through this pericope the preacher should seek to shape the church to live in these difficult gray and latter days in which we struggle against unbelief that vindication will ever come. The preaching should form the church to prayer relentlessly for God's justice, living the theology of the cross by praying when no answer seems to come. She knows the Lord's long-suffering in Christ's death and resurrection. He will vindicate his church.

Kent Burreson

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 133.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Just, *Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 673.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey, 140. (Emphasis original.)

## Proper 25 • Luke 18:9–17 • October 23, 2016

### Textual Notes

In this reading, Jesus moves from the world of the imagination, where he tells a parable (vv. 9–14), to the world of his ministry, where he blesses children (vv. 15–17). Both of these worlds are joined by a common problem and a common theme.

The common problem is contempt for others, seen in the description of the audience of the parable (v. 9) and in the reaction of the disciples to those who brought infants to Jesus (v. 15).

The common theme is that Jesus reveals God's gracious work in how he receives

the humble, seen in the pronouncements Jesus makes at the end of each section (v. 14b and 17) and by the actions of Jesus: in Jesus, those who are despised, despairing, and devalued by others are the ones who receive mercy and blessing from God.

Such a theme corresponds to the way Jesus later describes his mission: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (19:10).

## Homiletical Notes

Preaching on this text can be difficult because the text is subverting common ways of thinking that we no longer hold. For us, Pharisees are figures of self-righteousness only to be condemned (rather than models of righteousness blessed by God) and children are figures of innocence to be sentimentally loved (rather than figures of no social status intruding on a teacher’s time). To capture the shock of this text, a preacher needs to orchestrate a reversal in the sermon where those we assume to be unworthy are suddenly and surprisingly loved by God.

Another method would be to use a metaphor that unexpectedly links to Jesus and leads us to delight in his merciful mission in multiple ways. That is the format of the following sermon suggestion.<sup>1</sup> The sermon opens with a metaphor that surprisingly turns to Jesus so that we see his work of shocking mercy in a multitude of ways.

## Sermon Suggestion

### Life to the Lost

*Experiencing the Metaphor:* Open with the story of a child who keeps interrupting an adult conversation because he is messing with dirt. I think of a reception I attended where my conversation with an old friend was repeatedly interrupted because her son was, at first, playing in the dirt on the edge of the patio, then with an anthill, and then, after we had moved inside, with the dirt in a potted plant. His fascination with dirt impeded our conversation and kept us looking on the margins to see what he was doing.

*Opening the Eyes of Faith:* Continue by noting how Jesus, the Son of God, has a delight in messing with dirt. His ministry is filled with marginal moments of mercy. You find him on the edges, attending to the needs of the lowly and despised. From his birth that was announced to shepherds, to his death where he spoke graciously to a thief, to his resurrection where he visits downcast disciples, Jesus is found there on the margins bringing life to the lost. Other examples from Luke could be cited to establish the larger theme.

Now, examine the text and reveal how Jesus interrupts the “holy” conversations of those who despise others to listen to the humble cry of the publican and bring grace to the sinner. This action of Jesus is anchored in his mission to bear all sin and be the Savior for those who are lost, including me and you.

*Seeing the World Anew:* Close the sermon by offering examples from the contemporary world and the present congregation of Jesus interrupting our conversations to help us see him as our Savior and as the one who brings life to the lost.

Examples could include the work of Neil Shigley, an artist in San Diego, who



has a project called *Invisible People*. Once, when attending a gallery exhibition, he passed by a homeless person as he walked in the door. Their eyes briefly met but he continued in to the gallery. While looking at the artwork, he realized that there was a world he was not seeing: a world of over six thousand people homeless in San Diego, with as many as eighteen hundred children.

Shigley began talking with the homeless, taking a photograph, and then creating larger than life displays of their faces so that people see and share the mercy of God to others in the streets. Mark, one of these homeless, upon seeing his portrait, saw himself more clearly (he said, “When I look at the picture, I appreciate what I am, who I am”) and then confessed what he knew to be true about God: “The gift that God has for people is something, man . . . it’s beautiful.” “God feeds rats and roaches; he wouldn’t forget me.”<sup>2</sup>

In the parable, when the Pharisee sees the publican, he uses him to launch into a litany of his own good works. Jesus, however, helps us see things differently. He messes in the margins of our lives so that we see his work for sinful people and launch into a litany of God’s good work, his grace in Christ.

David Schmitt

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The sermon uses the metaphorical movement sermon structure identified by Justin Rossow and described at <http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/dynamic/metaphorical-movement/>.

<sup>2</sup> Neil Shigley, “Invisible People,” *Plough Quarterly*, Spring 2016, 26. [www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/art/invisible-people](http://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/art/invisible-people). Accessed May 6, 2016.

## Reformation Day • John 8:31–36 • October 30, 2016

Commemorating the sixteenth-century events that came to be called the Protestant Reformation is more complicated than it used to be. Triumphalism—a certain weirdly coiffed presidential candidate notwithstanding—is no longer in vogue. We left it behind in favor of our more cosmopolitan sensibilities. Moreover, the drop in religious literacy has further problematized our Reformation observances. Even some of our most dedicated Sunday worshippers have little or no awareness of what was happening when our namesake monk nailed a sheet of paper on the castle church door in Wittenberg. So, any celebration of the Reformation now often requires a sly pedagogy to provide enough context to make it meaningful.

The next year and a half may change all that. As people, institutions, and churches gear up for the looming 500th anniversary of that crucial moment in the life of Martin Luther and the history of Europe, there will be a deluge of information, complete with hashtags and the usual History Channel treatment. So, perhaps there is reason still to remember well the Reformation, if for no other reason than to correct the inevitable misunderstandings that go viral.

Of course, correcting a misunderstanding seems to be at the heart of this text



from John 8, a standard Reformation Day gospel reading. We enter into the middle of a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews, an ongoing back-and-forth that animates much of John's Gospel as a whole. In this case, the misunderstanding arises out of what it means to be born of Abraham. And, for Jesus, our very freedom as human beings is at stake.

The topic of freedom is a natural one for those who follow in the theological understandings of the namesake monk who penned the glorious treatise "The Freedom of the Christian" just three years after his 95 theses. But it can quickly become a delicate subject, lest we become the ones who proclaim, "We are descendants of [Luther] and have never been slaves to anyone" (8:33a, my own editorial insertion). The truths we hold to be self-evident can just as easily enslave as set us free.

Thus, we do well to begin our speaking about freedom the way Luther would. The freedom given in Christ is freedom from without, from outside ourselves, *extra nos*. There is a kind of *coram mundo* freedom that would seem to come from within, the kind of freedom that Americans see as a (self-)declaration of independence, the manifest destiny of the post-adolescents finally striking out on their own. But that freedom is usually bought and sold on the backs of those we consider less than human (or three-fifths human, as the Constitution originally had it), a zero-sum game.

This kind of freedom is, at best, a social contract and, at worst, an illusion. Every assertion of the self holds within it the possibility of a new kind of slavery. The freedom that truly gets to the bottom of things, that reaches into the heart of hearts, that breathes new life into every living creature, is the liberating kind, the kind that breaks through all our (self-)assertions with a freedom we never knew before. John reminds us that this liberating freedom comes in and with and under the word of Christ. And when Christ asserts it, we not only believe it to be true, we *abide* in it. We *dwell* in its immeasurable mystery of joy and gladness: "If you abide in my word, you are truly . . ." (8:31b).

To abide in the word of the Word made flesh is the life of faith, its dynamic and abundant life flowing from him to us, and through us to our neighbor. We find our freedom in faith. Or rather, it finds us. This is how we are made free. "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). Yes, *made* free. The same Son present at the creation of the world is re-creating us into a freedom that liberates us into the life he now so freely gives, the immeasurable triune life of God, overflowing and without end. This is, of course, the "happy exchange," that Christ takes all that is ours to give us everything that is his. Our various slaveries for his unbounded freedom.

This life is freely received and freely given. Or, as Luther puts it: "Who then can comprehend the riches and the glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing."<sup>1</sup> It is an infinity-sum game.

Which means this kind of freedom makes us act with a liberating freedom toward each other. On a final note, it should not be lost on us that the Jews to whom Jesus is speaking at this very moment are not the hostile Pharisees but the Jews "who had believed him" (8:30). John's little contextual clue thus becomes a convicting word to those who might use their freedom to berate and bully their fellow siblings on the

basis of the truths we hold to be self-evident. Lack of love is the most damning evidence of a life still enslaved from within.

Travis J. Scholl

<sup>1</sup> “The Freedom of the Christian,” in *Three Treatises* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1970), 305.

### **All Saints’ Day • Matthew 5:1–12 • November 6, 2016**

Crowds are always following Jesus looking for something. These crowds come from everywhere, not just the locals, and they’re filled with expectation. He always takes their expectations and transforms them into something more significant than they perhaps knew they needed. His Sermon on the Mount is a classic example.

He ascends a mountain to teach the commandments of God, just as Moses had ascended a mountain to receive commandments which Jesus would reinterpret beyond the letter to include the spirit of those commands. While people approached the presence of God on Sinai with fear and trepidation, they approach this mountain where God is present without fear and filled with great expectations as God sits in their midst to teach them like lambs gathered around their shepherd.

The Beatitudes are not just about being “happy,” as in “Don’t worry, be happy,” even if your situation doesn’t look very good right now. Happiness has a different quality to it than the Greek word “makarios,” although the word’s lexical meaning does indeed often include this emotion of happiness. But happiness can be rather fleeting as anyone knows who has been happy one minute and then gotten a phone call about a loved one diagnosed with cancer or who has gone to be with the Lord. “Blessedness” moves beyond emotion to a state of being, one that is not swayed by what happens to someone in the moment, but is instead characteristic of a person’s identity. The “poor in spirit” are not necessarily all that happy about their present state of affairs; but they are blessed in knowing that they are loved by God and their destiny is the “kingdom of heaven.” Those who mourn could hardly be considered happy; but they are blessed in knowing that as children of the God who has triumphed over death, they can truly find comfort. The meek are usually the ones who get trampled in the stampede of life; but they are blessed in knowing that the Lord of the universe humbled himself, taking the form of servant, even to the point of death on a cross so that they could inherit the earth.

Those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” sound rather needy—and they are; but acknowledging that, they know the righteous one will satisfy them with good things as he gives them his Spirit and all the gifts the Spirit has to bring such as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22–23). The “merciful” usually get taken for a ride, or get taken advantage of—rarely leading to happiness; but the merciful know that the Psalms are filled with the mercies of the Lord (Pss 18:25; 30:10; 57:1–2; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8)

because mercy is an attribute of God they not only share but benefit from that mercy every time they come to him in repentance and faith. “The pure in heart” are considered either naïve or too innocent to ever get very far in life; but they know the One who has called them by name has deigned to live within them and make himself known through his word which points to that day when they will fully know him and see him with their own eyes (Job 19:25–27). “Peacemakers” may be applauded for a time, but strife and envy soon follow—and the world knows that’s the way it is; but the peacemakers know the One who has brought peace to a broken and confused and utterly sinful world, who has brought them peace through the forgiveness of their sins and a conscience cleansed by water, the word, and his very own body and blood.

And finally, it is doubtful that “those who are persecuted for righteousness’s sake,” those who are reviled and have all kinds of evil spoken against them falsely because of Christ” are ever really happy; but they are blessed in the knowledge that they follow a great line of prophets and apostles who understood their identity in the One who was martyred for them.

In an “upside-down world” (to use Paul Bretscher’s phrase) enamored of the idea of “happiness,” a world that doesn’t know what it wants or needs, a world filled with great expectations but no capacity to deliver—we have our Lord’s words of wisdom and blessing that moves us from moments of happiness to the state of being blessed in the One who calls us “blessed.”

Joel Elowsky

## **Proper 28 • Luke 21:5–28 • November 13, 2016**

### **The Text as Text**

The text of this account in Luke’s gospel is well-attested, and there is no variant that is so problematic as to demand serious consideration. In v. 19 the future tense κτήσεσθε occurs in many manuscripts in place of the the eclectic text’s aorist κτήσασθε. It is thought more likely that the future arose as a scribal accommodation to the tense of the surrounding verbs. Rarely in the NT, the aorist is used to characterize an act which is valid for all times, and such may be the use here. Most English translations nevertheless render this verb as if it were a future tense. Otherwise the translation is relatively straightforward.

### **The Text as Literature**

The eschatological discourse stands at the end of the section of Luke’s gospel that recounts the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, beginning with 19:28, the bulk of which is centered on the teaching of Jesus in the temple. It is followed immediately by the passion narrative, beginning with the account of the Last Supper.

The discourse begins when Jesus hears his followers discussing the impressive appearance of the temple. This would have been quite a natural response to looking at

Herod's temple, which was not only opulently decorated but was also the largest religious structure in the world at the time. When Jesus tells them of the coming destruction of the temple they respond with the obvious question: when will this happen?

The remainder of the passage is an extended speech by Jesus. Jesus's response to the question goes far beyond the question itself. Jesus warns his followers about a number of things that will happen before the end: the coming of those who will teach falsely in his name (21:8); rumors of coming wars between nations (21:9–10); a variety of natural disasters (21:11); persecution leading to an opportunity to bear witness to Jesus (21:12–15); betrayal by family and friends (21:16); the hatred of all around them (21:17–19); the siege and destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of gentiles (21:20–24—the language of this section is particularly redolent of Old Testament motifs describing the destruction of cities); and the disruption of the cosmic order (21:25–26—this employs the language of chaos and the undoing of creation found in the Old Testament). Then, Jesus tells them, the Son of Man will come with power and glory (27:28).

### **The Text as Theology**

Jesus responds to their question by making two related points: First, he tells his disciples to be prepared to face what is to come. There is no sugar-coating here. The world that hated Jesus will hate his disciples. The whole history of the church will be a history of tribulation and suffering. In order to stand firm in the day of trial the disciples will need to be prepared.

The second point made by Jesus is that all of the hardship and suffering to come should not drive his followers to despair. He will not abandon them, but will give them wisdom to witness for him when the hour comes (21:15) and will preserve them in the midst of suffering (21:18–19).

These two points come together in the “surprise ending” of the discourse: “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (21:28). It is ultimately the certainty of their redemption in the Son of Man who will come in glory that will be the source of their strength and comfort as they face the hardships to come.

### **Proclaiming the Text**

#### **“Be Prepared . . . But Not Afraid”**

The central theme of a sermon on this text will draw upon the “surprise ending” of Jesus's discourse: faith in Christ and the certain hope of our redemption enables the Christian to be prepared to face the suffering to come without giving way to fear and despair. The text provides an opportunity to employ rhetorical skill in building up the picture of the suffering of the church, including examples of the many ways that these things are fulfilled in our age. The skilled preacher can re-create the anxiety that the disciples of Jesus must have experienced when they heard this discourse before the “twist” that all of this tribulation will be the sign for us to “straighten up and raise your heads,” because through faith in Christ we are certain that our redemption is drawing near.

David Adams

The drama of the text unfolds in three acts. The first act is the way of the cross with Jesus's word to the women who followed him on the way. The second act is the crucifixion at the place called "Skull." The third act is the mocking of Jesus. Yet amidst the mocking, there is another voice, the voice of the one criminal who sees through the entire scene and perceives Jesus's innocence.

The first act centers upon the mourning of the women who followed Jesus (23:27–31). Luke now speaks of a "multitude of the people" who follow Jesus to his crucifixion, suggesting a different and larger crowd from that which demanded his crucifixion (23:13). Women are present. They alone can mourn openly—weeping and wailing—without danger. They mourn the unjust death of a righteous man (23:37), one who went about doing good and healing (Acts 10:36–39), a prophet upon whom many had pinned their hopes for the redemption of Israel, as Cleopas and his sad companion later tell the risen Lord (24:19–21).

Jesus turns and responds to the women. Their mourning is misplaced. They need not mourn him, but should instead mourn themselves and their children. What is happening to Jesus is a mere anticipation of what is coming upon them "the daughters of Jerusalem." Judgment is coming, one so severe that they will "begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!'" Jesus alludes to the judgment that the prophet Hosea foretells (Hos 10:8). Now it is coming upon Jerusalem. It is hard to miss the allusion to the coming, catastrophic war with Rome (cf. Lk 13:1–5, 34–35; 21:20–24). This judgment will be even more brutal than what is coming upon Jesus (23:31). And Jesus in his words points to an even greater, final judgment that will follow: "they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!'" It is no surprise that at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the Apocalypse, the same allusion to Hosea 10:8 appears. In Jesus's death the judgment of the world has begun.

The second act is full of action (23:32–34). Two other criminals—Jesus is now counted among the criminals—are led with him to be done away with. They came to the place called "Skull." There "they" crucified Jesus; "they" cast lots, dividing his garments. Luke does not provide the subject of the pronoun: all involved, the chief priests, the former crowd, and the Romans are all guilty.

Finally comes the third act, the lengthiest. The crowd is now silent. The open mourning has now ceased. It is replaced by mocking. The mocking by the rulers, by the soldiers, and the mocking by one of the criminals. His mocking bears a note of bitterness: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (23:40). Then, beyond the misdirected mourning and the unbelieving mocking, come unexpected, surprising words of faith from the most unexpected person. The other criminal warns his fellow convict of the fear of God and of the justice of the judgment that the two of them are suffering. But weren't there three criminals (23:32)? This other criminal sees through appearances to Jesus's innocence. He trusts in the forgiveness that Jesus so often offered others. He trusts in Jesus's promise of the coming kingdom of God. And—most wonderfully of all—he trusts that this kingdom belongs to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" (23:42).

Jesus's response is equally wonderful: "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise!" (23:43). Paradise—a fulfillment of the garden of Eden—already exists. True, it must yet come to this earth. Yet the crucified criminal will be there with Jesus that very day. Jesus's promise shatters any and all schemes that count our growth as progress toward our bliss and salvation. It has been given to the criminal to perform the greatest deed of all. He believes that the crucified Jesus is Lord. In Jesus's death the life of the kingdom has come in the only way that it can—through judgment.

Mark A. Seifrid

# BOOK REVIEWS

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**DONA GRATIS DONATA: Essays in Honor of Normal Nagel on the Occasion of His Ninetieth Birthday.**

Edited by Jon D. Vieker, Bart Day, and Albert B. Collver III. The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 2015. 324 pages. Paper. \$24.95.

Norman Nagel has left his mark on several institutions beyond the Australian Lutheran church from which he sprang. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England and its seminary program at Westfield House still hear echoes of his voice. Valparaiso University recalls his steady pastoral hand and tones from his days as its chaplain. Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis continues to enjoy reflections of his insights into Scripture and the Lutheran tradition in its lectures and preaching. Norman's representation of the thought of Werner Elert and Hermann Sasse, of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, of ancient fathers as well as the prophets and apostles, shapes many a sermon ever yet throughout the English-speaking world.

Eighteen of his students have gathered their own reflections of Norman's mark on them, some in recollections from classroom and conversation, some in parts of the dissertations or theses prepared under his watchful and critical eye, some in extensions of the gifts that Norman gave them in the research they have carried on as they worked out the implications of his own insights. The feast is too great to provide a complete menu, so I can share only a few tidbits that have pleased and provoked me to further thinking.

William Cwirla captures so much of the heart of Nagel's way of thinking (as

does in even shorter form the volume's title) when in conclusion he writes, "Theology begins with God. It is God's word to us, not our words about God. He deals with us through the humble ordinariness of the incarnation" as well as the sacramental elements, the words of Holy Scripture and words of Holy Absolution, "in the company of those who have heard and confessed before us. . . . The professor has been our guide in our travels, and we are greatly enriched for having gone the way with him. Such is the way of the gospel, filling emptied mouths and ears and minds and hearts with God's good gifts in Jesus. We are ever on faith's receiving end of what God in Christ gives to us. We are, in the end, all beggars. This is true. The professor has taught us well in the way of the gospel" (9). Rudolph Blank's recollections confirm this sketch of the pastor, preacher, and pedagogue, the theologian of the church, that Norman is.

David Maxwell assesses Cyril of Alexandria's interpretation of Christ's cry of dereliction on the cross, and Kent Heimbigner explores "the nature, origin, and ramifications of evil in selected writings of St. Athanasius," carrying forward Norman's deep interest in our patristic heritage. Several essays pursue elements of the professor's intense work on and defense of the holy ministry, including Brian Moseman's, Jonathan Mumme's, and Naomichi Masaki's. Particularly intriguing is Thomas Winger's imaginative exploration of the function of the epistle in the liturgy and how it is part of the pastor's ministry.

Eugene Boe shows what can be done with Norman's focus on God's word in sacramental form, specifically baptis-

mal form, while Albert Collver and Joel Brondos explore elements of the biblical teaching on the Lord's Supper and its use in our day. John Pless presents a skillfully fashioned provocative glimpse of Hermann Sasse's relations with streams of thoughts and theologians from Germany and North America. Charles Arand explores implications of Luther's understanding of the goodness of God revealed in his creation and his providential care, reminding us that for all his emphasis on the second article of the Creed, Norman is indeed a Trinitarian theologian.

The rich tradition of Lutheran song has invited essays on Philipp Nicolai's pastoral care in the midst of dying and death as it takes form in his hymns (by Gerald Krispin), on the hymnodical tradition of Lutheranism as it found its role in the Missouri Synod (by Jon Vieker), and the importance of historic Lutheran hymnody (by William Weedon). Most delightful is the gift of a new hymn, written by Charles Henrickson and composed by Henry Gerike, "Always More than We Can Measure." Norman's theology sings well!

And at the end, Norman's own words, from an essay prepared for an earlier five-hundredth anniversary, that of Luther's birth, thirty-three years ago, in a volume edited by his Cambridge compatriot, Peter Newman Brooks. "Martinus: 'Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy!' The Person and Work of Christ" traces how Luther minded the creedal tradition of the church to proclaim the Lord, to preach the promise of Christ Jesus into the hearts of readers and hearers. The essay ends with Luther's explanation to the second article of the Creed, "that I may be his own, and live under him in

his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity." Who has ever said "this is most certainly true!" more emphatically than Norman Nagel?

From his initial encounter with Christ's promise as he was baptized in China to today, when he enjoys the company and encouragement of those who repeat the promise to him as he embodies its proclamation for us, Norman Nagel has made the message of the forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation through Christ's death and resurrection come alive for people around the globe. Reading this volume gives a glimpse, largely from the outside looking in, of the Holy Spirit's tool, Norman Nagel. What a gift!

Robert Kolb

**CONFUCIUS FOR CHRISTIANS: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ.** By Gregg A. Ten Elshof. Eerdmans, 2015. 102 pages. Paper. \$15.00.

Though not all may be similarly intrigued, given my years of ministry in the Chinese world, I was fascinated by the title and the subject matter. As it happens, missionaries and scholars in the "Middle Kingdom" (China) have been fascinated with Confucius for centuries, including most notably the succession of remarkable Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, followed by a wide variety of both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries ever since.

What triggers that attraction is admiration for the high ethical standards of Confucius and the openness of Confucius

to the world of the supernatural without the encumbrances of religious ritual. Add to that the enormous impact he has had on the Asian region, and the consequent deference the Asian region has for him. In a Christian context, missionaries over the years have felt that remnants of the image of God lingered with greater clarity in Confucius and his followers than in most places. That lingering image provided a richly graced platform where commonly shared ethical values could be affirmed, and where the Christian gospel could be shared as fulfillment of the somewhat opaque sense of the supernatural that Confucius admitted but left undeveloped. A close-to-home adaptation of this view gave rise to a pair of books published by Concordia Publishing House: *The Discovery of Genesis* and *Genesis and the Mystery Confucius Couldn't Solve*.

What Ten Elshof (director of the Center for Christian Thought and professor of philosophy at Biola University) has provided in this thoughtful and insightful book is neither a blanket commendation of Confucius or the Confucian tradition, nor a strategy for evangelism in a Confucian context. His view rather is that Confucius represents a wisdom tradition which expresses a relational morality that brings value and joy to life, and which in the process provides both justice and harmony to wider spheres of life (family, clan, village, and nation). As he develops those themes, Ten Elshof uses the Confucian Way (without elevating it above the Christian Way) (1) to critique modern Western society, including the Christian church insofar as it has wittingly or unwittingly breathed too deeply the fumes of worldviews inconsistent with

the Christian gospel, and (2) to enrich Christian sensitivity to values inherent in our faith but not always consistently pursued.

The bulk of Ten Elshof's book focuses on four moral qualities or spheres fundamental both to the Confucian Way and to the Christian Way. He begins appropriately with family as "the primary venue for growth into the full expression of being human for the Confucian," in contrast to the high value in Western society of autonomy and independence. From family flows learning, a spirit of humble curiosity about life, without ossifying into rigid, prejudicial judgments. Likewise, Confucian ethics remain relational and responsive to situations, resisting both legalistic ethical systems and unrooted antinomianism. Finally, and arguably most at odds with modern Western society, he devotes a chapter to ritual, which he describes as (1) training and discipline in the context of inherited relationships (familial and societal) and (2) outward accession to and expression of one's place in the relationships.

Of course, a small book like this leaves plenty of matters untouched. His clear focus on moral and ethical issues means he does not discuss issues of soteriology. Nor does he address the religiosity that has grown around Confucius in parts of the Confucian tradition. Missing also is a discussion of ways the Confucian tradition moved beyond and to some extent in contrast to Confucius: a ranking of status and privilege in society, a tightly circumscribed lifestyle, a view of elemental human goodness which minimizes corrosive effects of sin and evil.

Overall, however and within his defined scope, Ten Elshof has written a

readable, inviting book on the Christian Way as viewed through the lens of both the sage Confucius and Western culture. Aside from general use to understand better our own Christian faith and life, this would be a helpful resource for discussions with people among us from Confucian regions whom the Spirit has brought close to the gospel.

Henry Rowold

**PETER: False Disciple and Apostate according to Saint Matthew.** By Robert H. Gundry. Eerdmans, 2015. 139 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

This small book ably displays Robert Gundry's prowess as an exegete: his skill as a careful reader of texts, his commitment to reading both as a redaction critic as well as in a more narrative fashion, and his willingness to follow the texts wherever he thinks they are leading him regardless of the conclusions involved. Those who are at least passing familiar with Gundry's breadth of NT scholarship will not be surprised that his reading of how Matthew portrays the apostle Peter takes him to conclusions that are not, as far as I am aware, shared by any other scholar. Never afraid to strike out on his own, Gundry reveals his conclusion in the opening sentence of the foreword:

In this book I argue that, differently from the rest of the New Testament, the Gospel according to Saint Matthew portrays Peter as a false disciple who publicly apostatizes and who, like all false disciples whether or not they have publicly apostatized, is destined for eternal damnation. (vii)

This small book offers many exegetical insights that readers can appreciate even if one arrives at the end unconvinced of the major conclusion toward which Gundry has argued. I shall briefly describe the book's presentation, and follow that with my own appreciation and critique.

Chapter 1 ("Introduction") lays out the plan for the study, including Gundry's seven hermeneutical assumptions; his reading is guided both by traditional redaction-critical comparisons of Matthew with (earlier) Mark as well as by more holistic and narrative perspectives. In chapter 2, Gundry surveys Matthew's "Petrine texts" prior to Matthew 16:13–23. Of particular interest are Gundry's comments on 14:22–33, where Peter walks on the water. Gundry rightly, in my view, shows that Peter's words and actions hardly present him in a positive light. Gundry's own conclusion about Peter in this text is this: "Jesus's last word [to Peter] underscores Peter's little faith and doubt, not faith in Jesus's power to save him from drowning. There is not even partial praise, only rebuke."

Chapter 3 examines "Peter in Matthew 16:13–23." There Gundry argues strongly that there is no reference or allusion to Peter as "rock" in Jesus's famous words; rather, "upon this rock I will build my church" refers to Jesus's own words (Mt 7:24). Gundry then rightly underscores how shocking it is for Peter to rebuke Jesus in 16:22 ("Imagine, a disciple rebuking his master!" [28]) and emphasizes that Jesus calls Peter "my snare" (σῆματόν μου).

Chapter 4 examines Peter in texts "from the Mount of Transfiguration through the Garden of Gethsemane."

Gundry emphasizes Peter's foolish behavior and speech on the Mount of Transfiguration and also the apostle's braggadocio in claiming that he would be willing to die rather than deny Jesus (26:31–35); Jesus, of course, predicts a three-fold denial on Peter's part.

Chapter 5 examines Peter's denial of Jesus along with Judas's suicide. As my reader might guess by now, Gundry finds that Matthew's portrait of Peter is darkly negative, and Gundry ends the chapter with this question:

Why does Matthew introduce after Peter's going outside and weeping bitterly a chronologically and topographically disjointed account of Judas Iscariot's suicide if not to draw a parallel of similarity between Peter's final state and that of the man who would have been better off if he had not been born? (62)

After comparing texts where Mark's Gospel mentions Peter but Matthew's parallels omit him (chapter 7), Gundry examines "Persecution in Matthew" (chapter 8). Chapter 9 sets itself to "explore some possible implications, both high-critical and theological, of Matthew's portrayal of Pete as a false disciple who apostatized and is consequently bound for eternal damnation" (100).

My typical reader (someone who subscribes to or receives the *Concordia Journal*) may likely be saying at this point, "Is Gundry crazy?" The answer would be, "No, he's not—not even close." Although there are things in this little book with which I disagree, this is the work of a learned exegete, and his work should not be dismissed. Although I think that Gundry's main conclusion goes too far, he is reading the texts closely and a careful reading will invite

us—and at times, even force us—as Gundry's readers to go back and examine the texts ourselves. This is a good thing. Moreover, by way of support for Gundry's work I will say this: I agree that Matthew portrays Peter as one who, in his denial of Jesus in chapter 26, has fallen away; Peter has apostatized. As I have said in many places in public lecture, the only difference between Peter and Judas is that Judas kills himself and so leaves no room for restoration. No disciple remains to follow after Jesus; Jesus is left utterly alone—and that even by his Father (27:46).

It is at this point, however, that Gundry's analysis falters. In rightly pointing out how Matthew often offers Peter as a negative example, Gundry commits two errors. First, he does not deal fairly with the evidence that Matthew wants his hearers/readers to regard Peter as a typical disciple, an example of what is true for all of Jesus's disciples. Gundry's reading of Matthew 26:35 illustrates the weakness of his position. In the Markan parallel, the narrative declares that after Peter's blustering claim to faithfulness, "all the disciples were speaking *identically* [ὡσαύτως]" (Gundry's translation, 41). Matthew writes, "all the disciples spoke *similarly* [ὁμοίως]." On this slim redaction-critical observation, Gundry writes, "The shift from sameness to similarity makes Peter's coming failure to avoid denying Jesus stand out as distinctive." The only possible way that Matthew could effectively communicate this message would be to provide a copy of Mark to his hearers, and then underline and highlight the change. This seems wrong-headed. In Matthew, Peter stands in this and in other texts as the representative of

the larger group of disciples or apostles. This is why both Mark and Matthew read (with no meaningful difference in wording) at the end of the arrest scene, “Then *all* the disciples forsook him and fled” (Mt 26:56; Mk 14:50).

Second, Gundry leaves no room for Peter’s restoration after the apostle has fallen, and he minimizes the evidence that invites this conclusion. Gundry (46) strangely insists that Jesus’s words about denying him before men (10:33) “left no room for repentance and restoration”—a severe over-reading of Jesus’s warning, I would suggest. To be sure, Matthew does not narrate a personal restoration of Peter’s status, such as one finds in John 21. Gundry (55) downplays, however, the fact that the Eleven (including Peter) meet Jesus on the mountain in Galilee (28:16–20). Also argued away is Peter’s place in the promises to build the church and to exercise the keys to the reign of God in 16:17–19. Finally, the repeated promise that Jesus will go ahead of the entire group of disciples into Galilee (26:32; 28:7, 10) connects to the (implied) restoration of all who forsook Jesus and fled—including Peter.

This is small book, but Gundry has packed a lot into it. Despite what I regard as an exaggerated conclusion, a careful reading will help underscore that Peter, like all of Jesus’s disciples in Matthew, depends completely and utterly on the compassion of Jesus for his status as a disciple. And that is a message that can resonate with every reader of Matthew’s Gospel.

Jeffrey Gibbs

**LOVE THIS DAY: 100 Sonnets from the Days of the Bible.** By Lonie Eatherton. Copyright 2015, Lonie Eatherton, Fenton, Missouri. Hardcover. No price given.

*Love This Day* is a collection of one hundred artistically sophisticated sonnets not only theologically sound but also theologically profound. Each sonnet is dedicated to a specific relative, friend, church member, professor, fellow pastor, or church group, and the date of each sonnet’s authorship is noted. For each poem Pastor Eatherton provides the Scripture passage(s) on which the content of the poem is based. “The days of the Bible” motif mentioned in the book’s subtitle is especially evident in the initial sonnets dealing with the seven days of creation and in those sonnets speaking of judgment day and other days important to the accomplishment of our eternal salvation.

Nearly all the sonnets consist of the fourteen lines typical of this genre and are Shakespearean in form. That is, they consist of three stanzas of four lines each (called quatrains) followed by a closing couplet. This poetic structure is useful for dealing with three different persons or situations or viewpoints and then neatly summarizing or resolving the discussion in the closing two lines or, better yet, concluding the discussion with a Hitchcockian twist or an O. Henry ending. This poetic structure is especially useful when its form reinforces the poem’s content. Sonnet 71, for example, talks about youth in the first quatrain, middle age in the second, and old age in the third, then ends with a couplet asserting the application of the gospel



for any age. Sonnet 98 not only presents three colors (green, red, and blue) in its three quatrains but with the addition of the closing couplet arranges these colors climactically rather than democratically with the assertion that red is the best of the three for describing God's world because red is the color of Jesus's saving blood. Sometimes, as in Sonnet 46, this hierarchical arrangement is even verbally signaled: from "better yet" in the first quatrain to "bested by" in the second quatrain to "better still" in the third quatrain. An added virtue in the first two sonnets cited above is the presence of a device called anaphora, beginning each quatrain with a similar expression: "Come watch and pray" in Sonnet 71 and "Look out" and "Look up" and "Look there" in Sonnet 98.

The bulk of the sonnets even adhere to the Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme: abab, cdcd, efef, gg. For variety, Pastor Eatherton sometimes employs an aabb, ccdd, eeff, gg rhyme scheme. In Sonnets 43 and 76 he challenges his capacity for rhyme by creating four identical rhymes for each of the three quatrains (aaaa, bbbb, cccc). A genuine tour de force is an acrostic sonnet (number 8), beginning each half line with a different letter of the alphabet arranged in their customary sequence. The last sonnet in the book is a George Herbert-like dialogue between the Christian and God, the different speakers identified by italicizing God's reply to the Christian's request in each of the three quatrains. In Sonnet 73 the poet employs the familiar frame or bookend device with a reference to paradise in the closing line echoing a reference to paradise in the opening line. Subtle, John Donne-like humor

permeates the poet's speculations about Methuselah in Sonnet 10 and especially his discussion of the camel's limitations in passing through the needle's eye in Sonnet 65 (my favorite).

The prevailing meter in the sonnets is iambic pentameter (e. g., "The *Word of God* held *close* to *Aa* - ron's *heart*" (from Sonnet 14) with enough of the necessary irregularities in the meter to prevent the sonnet sounding like a jingle or having a soporific effect. Pastor Eatherton avoids the amateur poet's weakness of forced rhymes. Run-on lines (called enjambement), another poetic virtue, are also characteristic of Eatherton's poems.

The most notable virtue of this collection of sonnets is its biblical content. What a fun way *Love This Day* provides for refreshing the reader's knowledge of Bible people, Bible incidents, and Bible doctrine. Above all, the sonnets are christocentric. Nearly all the closing couplets are gospel. A unique example of this gospel emphasis is Sonnet 14, where Pastor Eatherton's speculations in the quatrains about the mysterious Urim and Thummin of the Bible are connected in the closing couplet with the life-giving Scriptures as our all sufficient guide. The ending of Sonnet 4 says it all: "For every object set in space / Reflected Your great magnitude of grace!"

Given their consistent gospel content, these sonnets, I maintain, are useful for Christian worship. While not simplistic, these sonnets are simple enough for people not comfortable with poetry to understand and to delight in. They are ideal for private or small group devotion. Preachers, too, can find them useful for their sermons. (After all, they quote hymns in their sermons!) If read carefully

and intelligently from the pulpit, these sonnets can indeed communicate God's truth. Perhaps (having first acquired the author's permission, of course!) one or the other of these sonnets could be printed in the church bulletin, eye contact aiding the understanding of oral proclamation.

Incidentally, *Love This Day* is just one of a series. Four other collections of sparkling sonnets are available from the pen of Lonie Eatherton: *For the Love of God*, *Love Grows Here*, *Where Love Breaks*, and *As I Love You*, each of them as good as the volume I chose to review.

If there were such a phenomenon in our beloved church, I would nominate Pastor Eatherton for the position of poet laureate of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Francis C. Rossow

**OUR GREAT BIG AMERICAN GOD: A Short History of Our Ever-Growing Deity.** By Matthew Paul Turner. Jericho Books, 2014. 256 pages. Hardcover. \$20.00.

Cultural critic Matthew Paul Turner writes a historical perspective on the place and role of God in American history in this sometimes cynical, oft-times critical evaluation of American Christianity. Turner focuses primarily on the history of the churches coming out of the Reformed/Calvinist traditions with little or no attention paid to either the Lutheran or Episcopalian traditions. On the one hand this would seem to slight the review toward Reformed traditions as the majority of American Christians; on the other hand, it acknowledged the reality of what American Christianity largely

consists of. Likewise, only nominal attention is paid to Roman Catholicism.

The author's premise is stated at the outset: "Where would God be without America?" Reflecting on a tongue-in-cheek supposition of "America as God's country," Turner recalls a conversation with an acquaintance that moves him to review the history of God and America, and the seeming co-dependency they have for one another (in his estimation) from the Puritan beginnings of the nation. From his prologue, he states his case:

For four hundred years, Americans have narrated God's story, and during that time, God has grown and evolved, become bigger and more unbelievable. Our stories have added theologies and folklore, miracles and fear, pro-*this* narrative and anti-*that* themes, ghost stories and strobe lights, Sarah Palin and more than a little humanistic sensibilities. In our efforts to make God known, we've quite possibly turned God into something that resembles us, a big fat American with an ever-growing appetite for more.

Mindful of what Turner would phrase the "on-going development of God," the author begins his review of how the American Christian culture began as the Puritans left heterodox England for "An American Resurrection of God," bringing with them the ideal and goal of building a new nation as a "city on a hill." Additional chapter titles include: "The Total Depravity of God," "God in the Hands of Angry People,"



“The Evangelicals are Coming!,” “The Independence of God,” “The Divided States of God,” “God’s American Fundamentals,” “God’s Mission According to America,” “Holy American Spirit,” and “One Nation Under Gods.” Throughout Turner’s study he leads one to appreciate that the “one, true God” seems to morph into numerous apparitions from the variety of religious flavors that develop in the fertile soil of the “new world.” Subsequently the Christian dialogues that come and go are based upon differing understandings of the Christ-story and God’s role in history (or, “his-story” as Rick Warren suggests).

Most interesting is Turner’s exposition on the development of Christian fundamentalism in America from the ministry of D. L. Moody through the efforts of Jerry Falwell. Parallel to fundamentalism’s development is the other side of the coin found in spiritualism and Pentecostalism which have defined the current American Christian culture. From these clashing theological and value systems, the author maintains that “GOD®” developed out of the mixture of the fundamentalist message and the social conscience ministry of Billy Graham. Of this last American phenomenon—that is GOD®—Turner writes:

Perhaps the most powerful function of GOD® is its ability to be everything that God cannot be or has chosen not to be. . . . GOD® can be merchandized, politicized, modernized, and super-sized. GOD® can make lofty promises, offer interest rates, make life miserable for gay people, and abduct small

children and take them on tours of heaven. GOD® can . . . declare President Obama to be the Antichrist, and micromanage the egos of megachurch pastors. . . . GOD® puts doctrine before people, legislation before people, theology before people, and laws before people. GOD® can be created, refashioned, edited and manipulated into our own image and used however we see fit.

Obviously when we approach the work of a proclaimed “cultural critic,” there is a selected view of history and culture that may not agree with our personal values or viewpoints. Turner seems to come from a disenchantment with much of the American Christian culture that underlies his satire. However, his reflections on the development of American Christianity is arguably insightful in many ways. From a Lutheran perspective, Turner’s overview provides an insight that many Lutherans may not necessarily gain from looking parochially at the history of Lutheranism in America. The benefit of *Our Great Big American God* is looking at American Christianity from a totally different (if not biased) perspective. The writing is simultaneously thought-provoking and gut-wrenching, but the cynical tough lightens its mood to keep one’s interest. If you have an interest in another consideration of how Christianity in America has developed a unique culture, this book is for you.

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Claremont, North Carolina

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—Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

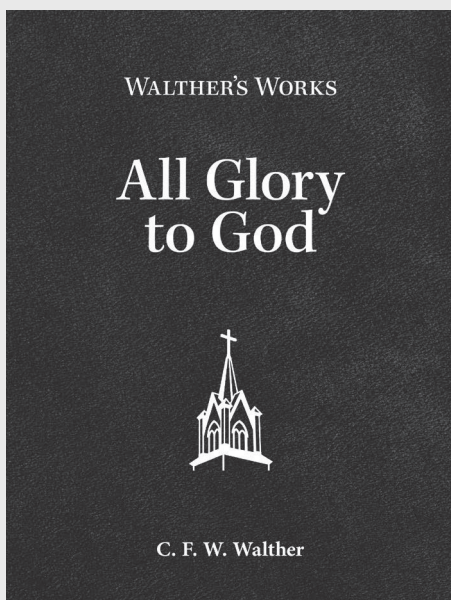
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—Thomas Manteufel

Professor Emeritus,

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