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Editor's Note

Everything is theological. Certainly, that assertion is true based upon who God is. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the One creating the ends of the earth" (Is 40:28). As the Creator of the ends of the earth, Yahweh has claim over all things. Because this is true of God, there is a resulting truth for man created in his image. "I therefore urge you, brothers, through the mercies of God to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, and well-pleasing to God." Every aspect of our lives, both individual and corporate, is a confession of who we are as creatures living under the care of the Creator.

On one hand, that is a call to wisdom. From what ought I repent because my life does not faithfully confess Christ? How have we corporately either as the church or in the civil realm ordered ourselves in a manner that is not in keeping with the order given to us by our Creator? Individually and corporately, our entire Christian life is one of repentance. Yet, there is a beautiful freedom that comes with all things being theological. Our lives, individual and corporate, not only give reason for repentance, but also testify to the Creator's goodness within His creation.

This edition of *Concordia Journal* gives opportunity to practice wisdom in all things being theological while also rejoicing in the beauty of all things being theological. David Schmitt invites us to see that beauty with a brief introduction, "Theology and Interdisciplinary Inquiry." He sets the stage for two examples of how interdisciplinary inquiry enriches the theologian.

Steve Zank offers one example in "Preaching the Law through Horatian Satire." Some may quickly reject the thought of a first-century BC Roman satirist offering homiletical insight. But when theologians consider the rhetorical impact of Horatian satire, fresh insights come forth. Those insights are especially needed in an age that resists the proclamation of the law. Rather than diminishing the law, Zank argues that Horatian satire offers a means for the law to be faithfully delivered and then heard.

Joshua Pfeiffer presents an interdisciplinary study that is also cross-cultural as he examines the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. in other cultures beyond the United States. King's iconic "I Have A Dream" speech offers a powerful interface with Aboriginal spirituality in Pfeiffer's native Australia which in turns gives insight into Australian Christianity. The use of dreams by God are replete in Scripture from the patriarch Joseph to Daniel to Joseph, the guardian of Jesus. Even more, this article gives insight to how the church engages the culture winsomely and with edifying effect.

Eric Andrae's "Preventing the Poisonous Pitfalls of Politicization and Polarization" is saturated with wisdom as Christ's right hand engages the left hand. The heightened political tension in American society is manifest on college campuses. As a seasoned campus pastor, Andrae has helped young Christians caught in the political tug-of-war. Now, he offers that wisdom for us so that we bend the knee only before Christ rather than the competing allegiances of American politics.

It is not difficult to be disheartened by our cultural moment. But those who confess that Christ is Lord of all creation are strengthened in hope and confidence. All we see is part of a fallen creation. The fallenness is undeniable. But the day is coming when it will be fallen no more. What we see around us will ever be Christ's creation. That means it is good, even now amid its fallenness. See his goodness shining through.

Kevin Golden
Dean of Theological Research and Publications

Lives Shaped by the Bible's Stories

Pastors tell stories. Among the many duties a pastor is called to fulfill, one of the most important is also one of the most simple and straightforward: to tell and to re-tell the stories of what God has done.

What is your favorite Bible story? David and Goliath? Elijah and the fiery chariot? Daniel in the lion's den? Jesus walking on the water? Jesus feeding a great crowd with loaves and fish from one boy's lunch? Thomas touching the wounds of his risen Lord and God?

For many people, the mention of such stories takes them back to childhood. But the prophets and apostles did not record these stories only for children. It is a tragedy and a great loss when the church relegates these stories to Sunday school or the primary grades, when the church sees these stories as childish or unimportant for adults.

God's struggling people need a steady diet of these stories. Faced with suffering, shame, and disillusionment, the Psalmist teaches us to pray: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds" (Ps 77:11–12). The stories of the Bible rehearse God's great deeds. They rehearse God's steadfast love and faithfulness across generations. And climactically, they rehearse the saving deeds of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The personal letters of C. F. W. Walther, first president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the first president of Concordia Seminary, show how this great theologian and pastor was shaped by the stories of Scripture. On May 4, 1860, upon his arrival in Germany, Walther wrote a letter to his faithful wife, Emilie, who was home in St. Louis. The concluding paragraph illustrates the way in which the Bible's stories give shape to a Christian's faith and life:

> May God bestow upon you good health, as upon Sarah, good fortune as upon Esther, and grace as upon the God-fearing Elizabeth. May He give you strength to carry out, besides your motherly duties, also my duties to the dear children He has given us. May He incline their hearts to obey you in a pious attitude like dutiful children. May He constantly fill your heart with comfort and joy in your solitude. May He help that we may see each other here again and in Him joyfully walk the path toward our heavenly

> Zion. May He be a protecting wall of fire all around you and preserve all of you like the apple of His eye.[1]

Walther's tone may strike us as quite formal for a letter to his wife. But his concern for her well-being and for God's care over their home during his absence is evident and touching. Note especially the way Scripture and its stories shape Walther's understanding of life. The stories of God's provision and love for Sarah, Esther, and Elizabeth are directly relevant to everyday life. What hope does Walther have that God will grant health to his 49-year-old wife? He recalls the story of God sustaining Abraham's wife Sarah, even giving her a healthy child at age 99. What confidence does Walther have that events will unfold favorably for Emilie while he is away? He recalls God's providential watchfulness over Esther and the Jews, preserving them from the threatening schemes of Haman. Why does Walther trust God to show kindness to his wife? Long ago, God showed grace to Elizabeth, giving her a child in her old age and the joy of a visit from her relative Mary, the mother of her Savior.

Because Emilie was steeped in the stories of Scripture, Walther could simply mention the names—Sarah, Esther, Elizabeth—and Emilie could recall the concrete and colorful details of God's mercy toward these women. As a result of these stories of God's mercy and faithfulness, Emilie could confess, along with the psalmist, "I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."

Seeking refuge and strength in the stories of God became a holy habit for Walther. As seen above, this was true not only in his public preaching and teaching and in his pastoral care of parishioners, but also in personal, private situations. For Walther, the stories of Scripture reveal a God who will be faithful and merciful *also to him, and to his family.*

During Advent of 1871, Walther wrote a letter to his son, Ferdinand, a young pastor. He refers to a previous letter from Ferdinand, which "contains the complaint that despair often overcomes you, so that your heart would nearly break."[2] His son had confided that although he was preaching and showing others the way of salvation, he felt lost, and that his preaching was only lip service. In reply, Walther offers rich Scriptural comfort and encouragement, especially from the story of the father of a demon-possessed son, who came to Jesus for help. Walther writes,

> Christ said to him, "If you can believe." Then the father felt how difficult it would be for him to believe, and thus he cried with tears, "I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief!" And what did Jesus do? Did he say to the father, "Your faith must first be cleansed from all unbelief?" No, but he helped him (Mk 9:17–27). See yourself in this fine example. I think you are also such a patient as that father was.[3]

Sixth months later, Walther penned another difficult family letter, this time to his son-in-law, Stephanus Keyl in New York. The letter conveys the heartbreaking news

that Keyl's daughter Emmie (Walther's granddaughter) had died while visiting the Walther home in St. Louis.

> I really hoped that God would hear my daily sighs and prayers so that you would not be deprived of any of your dear children. But see, our thoughts were not God's thoughts, nor were our ways God's ways. As far as the heavens are higher than the earth, so His ways were higher than our ways. Two children were left to us, but one, our dear, sweet Emmie, He took from our lips, from our lap, and from our arms. Besides the measles, Emmie had pneumonia, and just at the time when she was teething. For God these three enemies of that young life would not have been overwhelming, but for the tender child it was too much, and since the Lord of life had resolved from eternity that this innocent child should never know the evil of the world, there was no delay; God hurried her out of this miserable life and refreshes her now even with joy before His own countenance.[4]

As Walther continues, where does he point Stephanus in order to comfort him? Again, he invokes the stories of Scripture—scenes of Abraham, Jesus, and Job:

> We also know that when God lays a cross on us, this is not His anger but rather a sign of His love. With this He clothes us with the livery of His children, who must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations. We are thereby to become like the father of all believers [Abraham], who was required to prove his faithfulness thereby, that when God required him, he had to lay his own son, whom he loved, as a sacrifice on God's altar. But above all we are thereby to become like the picture of the Son of God Himself, who never laughed, but wept much in this vale of tears …. Join us in drying your tears and in speaking with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."[5]

It is worth asking ourselves whether the church of our generation has this same vibrant sense of God's stories and their connection to our lives. Danger and death attend those who forget them. The book of Judges tells us: "The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, *who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel*." But the next generation "did not know the LORD, *nor the work which He had done for Israel*." The result? "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Jgs 2:7, 10–12). Things went downhill fast from there.

One of the most important and joyous tasks of a pastor, then, is to tell the stories of God. The pastor is a reporter, delivering the facts of God's work in the lives of His people of old. The pastor is a herald, shouting forth news of God's victories. The pastor is a bard, singing with eloquence, vividness, and passion the great saga of God and His world, in its many ages and stages, in its many settings and scenes, and ultimately in its heroic center: the world-redeeming work of God's own Son. These tales are so lively and life-giving, so rich and refreshing, that they bear repeating. With each telling they grow more dear. With each telling they root themselves more deeply in the hearers, becoming an integral part of their daily life, faith, and outlook.

In order to faithfully report, proclaim, and impart the stories of God, pastors must be deeply familiar with the Bible's accounts. Therefore, this is a key preparation for those considering seminary and the pastoral ministry. These stories remain fundamental to pastors throughout their lives, both as children of God themselves and as those who proclaim God's Word to others. Therefore, pastors should develop a discipline of reading and reflecting on the Bible's stories. Read, read, read the stories of God, so that you can tell, tell, tell the stories of God.

Thomas Egger

Endnotes

1 *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Letters,* ed. August R. Suelflow, trans. Roy A. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 34.
2. *Selected Writings,* 43. Letter is dated December 13, 1871.
3. *Selected Writings,* 44.
4. *Selected Writings,* 46. Letter is dated May 22, 1872.
5. *Selected Writings,* 46–47.

Theology and Interdisciplinary Inquiry

In graduate school, I participated in a fascinating conversation about Andrew Marvell's seventeenth-century poem, "The Garden." In this graduate seminar, scholars from various disciplines had gathered to model interdisciplinary inquiry. Although we were all researchers in the early modern period and although we were all reading the same poem, we were not all reading it the same way. Our readings were situated within our various disciplines. Scholars from art history, religion, poetry, drama, history, medicine, architecture, and botany brought insights into this one poem by Marvell.

During the conversation, different disciplines were brought to bear upon the poetry. The role of gardens in seventeenth-century landscaping, their visual depiction in art, the typological meaning of gardens in religious belief, the role of gardens in social trysts upon the stage, the court records of crimes committed within public gardens in London, the role of particular plants in medicinal use, and the importance of these plants in mapping out a changing ecological system, all of these different worlds were coming together in ways that gave the poem deeper and richer meaning. When read through these various disciplines, the poem, like a prism, reflected and refracted the light in a fuller and richer abundance of meaning.

That seminar introduced me to the value of cultural study. Cultural study is a discipline of disciplines. That is, as a discipline, it seeks to foster conversation between various disciplines in order to celebrate the values of a disciplinary approach to knowledge even as it answers an inherent danger of such an approach.

What are the values and dangers of academic disciplines? Historically, the development of disciplines has been valuable. It has provided space for scholars to devote their lives to very specific interests. A scholar can devote his or her life to reading and analyzing one cultural artifact (for example, *Paradise Lost* or the Gospel of Mark). Such dedication provides us with an extraordinary fund of highly detailed and specific knowledge. This knowledge helps us as we consider how cultural artifacts (for example, a poem about a garden) make meaning in cultural exchange (for example, by being included in an anthology of religious verse).

Unfortunately, however, disciplines have drawbacks. Isolation and fragmentation. Scholarship, while increasing in depth, has suffered in breadth. Scholars can become so engrossed in their particular discipline, that they lose sight of other disciplines or other ways of knowing. A scholar of J. S. Bach, who has focused primarily on Bach's

1734 Christmas Oratorio, is unaware of the playfulness with which Milton creates neologisms in Paradise Lost, another topic to which another scholar has devoted her life. Sometimes, these isolated insights from various disciplines never need to meet. But other times, as in the graduate seminar experience of reading Marvell's poem within various disciplines, these isolated insights contribute greatly to a deeper understanding of meaning. There are times when we could be more well-informed if our disciplines were in conversation with one another.

Through the practice of interdisciplinary inquiry, cultural study seeks to bring disciplines into communication with one another. Various fields of knowledge are brought to bear on how meaning is made from cultural artifacts in a process of cultural exchange. In a sense, interdisciplinary inquiry seeks to use the first article wisdom that God has given in a way that enables the disciplines to speak to one another, overcoming isolation and fragmentation, and inspiring collaboration and broader insightful contemplation of the world in which we live and within which we carry out God's mission.

The following essays by Steve Zank and Josh Pfeiffer are precisely that, essays—"attempts" at theological cultural study. They seek to foster a lively interaction of disciplines in theological conversation.

The role of theology in cultural settings has often been limited to policing and protecting. The theologian seeks to police cultural activities, highlighting what is dangerous to the soul, and to protect God's people, articulating for them appropriate responses of avoidance, blame, or correction.

These essays, however, seek to engage cultural exchange in a different way, as part of a much larger conversation, where a study of a particular cultural artifact and the making of meaning in cultural exchange might inform the church's dialog and call forth theological considerations that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

For each study, you will notice how the authors identify a cultural artifact (for instance, a piece of art or a public speech), use various disciplines to explore the way in which that artifact makes meaning, and then consider how that interdisciplinary inquiry can be of value to the church. Since these are essays or "attempts," they are inductive in form, exploratory. They will begin by observing something of value in a cultural moment and then allow the study and conversation among disciplines to take them into the realms of theology.

May your reading of these studies be filled with moments of discovery, and may such moments of discovery remind you of Paul's encouragement: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, what is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8).

David Schmitt

Articles

Preaching the Law through Horatian Satire

Steve Zank

Steve Zank serves as Director of the Center for Worship Leadership and the Director of Parish Music Program at Concordia University Irvine where he hosts the worship-focused podcast "Theology in Motion." Steve also enjoys his work as a teacher, musician, music producer, and PhD student.

Returning from vicarage to study for my final year of seminary, I remember our community being treated to a speech by the newly elected president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison. President Harrison shared many sentiments with us but the one that has stood out to me over the years has been his encouragement that preachers should not neglect the preaching of the law. Using Walther, he has continued to share this message across the synod. Recently he appeared in the February 2022 online edition of *Lutheran Witness* again quoting Walther: "Do not hesitate to preach the Law! People may despise it, yet they do so only with your mouths, because the things you say when preaching the Law are the same things that their own conscience preaches to them every day."[1]

This is critical advice for the preacher to heed, for as Martin Luther reminded his readers in his commentary on Genesis: "before the Law was known, this sin lay there as though dead or sleeping, just as is stated below to Cain (Gn 4:7): 'If you do evil, your sin will lie still until it is revealed.'"[2] The preaching of the law is an attempt to uncover our community-wounding selfishness—and while the law is written on our hearts (Rom 2:12–16), it is the preacher's task to reawaken our self-awareness.

The preaching of the law in North America today, however, is problematized by three factors: (1) our postmodern society, (2) the intransigence of sin, and (3) our profoundly angry culture. First, our postmodern society is increasingly suspect of

people telling other people what to believe, especially in the instance of a member of the clergy of an *institutional* church telling people about their shortcomings from its "objective," biblical perspective. Walter Brueggeman referred to this experience as "subjective consciousness":

> One form of reductionism is the practice of a subjective consciousness. That is, we no longer imagine a real life, responding other with a center of its own. We imagine that reality is only us, our yearnings and our cravings. In such a collapsed world, there is no real speech, because there is no one but us, no one to address, no one to answer, no one to whom to speak seriously, no one who addresses us with authority. We are seduced into being alone, alone with our wishes and cravings, but also alone with our hopes and our fears, alone in our silence, without speech.[3]

When we do not allow others to speak meaningfully into our lives, however, we are left alone with our blindness to sin. In such a world we become resistant to a particular reality simply because it has been offered to us by another.

Second, there is the matter of the intransigence of sin. In *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, Simeon Zahl contends that affects

> are relatively *intransigent* features of religious life, in the sense that they are core dimensions of religious life that are much more difficult to shift than doctrines or religious practices . . . Sinful desires and dispositions are so stubbornly resistant to top-down efforts at transformation that when the New Testament authors want [to] speak about the ethical transformation of Christians, they very often attribute such change to an external, divine agency, the Holy Spirit.[4]

Therefore, Zahl argued that ethical transformation is not easily preached into someone, rather, as Luther contended, sin creates a blind spot in the creature as to its very existence. Hence, the church relies on the Holy Spirit for the fruit of repentance.

Finally, the preaching of the law is problematized by our profoundly angry culture. Imagine a preacher that is preaching the law to his congregation. What is his demeanor? What is his posture and the character of his voice? I'd wager that many of us have in mind some version of a pastor sternly addressing the congregation, pointer finger outstretched in a top-down approach to behavioral correction.

If this is your visualization of the preaching of the law, Zahl and Brueggeman offer a warning: your hearer is stubbornly resistant and living in a collapsed world of subjective consciousness. In such an environment this kind of law preaching may not penetrate the heart of such a hearer. Therefore, we are faced with three options.

The preaching of the law is problematized by our profoundly angry culture.

Either we can (1) disparage human agency in bringing about repentance, (2) use more direct and more intense methods of confrontation, or (3) look for new ways to bring about the self-reflection of hearers. The first option, to disparage human agency in the proclamation of the law, is untenable as it goes against the foundation of preaching in the Lutheran tradition. Even though Lutherans rely on the efficacy of the word and the agency of the Holy Spirit for the success of prophetic preaching, it must be maintained that the craft and rhetoric of the preacher make a significant difference. In his *Pastoral Theology* John Fritz reminded us that

> the *ultimate purpose* of all preaching is to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and a godly life…Preaching that has made no impression whatsoever upon the heart of the hearer has been faulty preaching. While it is true that only the Holy Spirit can, through the power of His Word, teach and influence the heart of man, and while the preacher cannot add anything to the power of the Word of God, yet — sad, but true — the preacher can stand in the way of, and hinder, the work of the Holy Spirit.[5]

Therefore, it can be said that the artful craft of the preacher affects the hearer's ability to connect with the work of the Spirit. Going even further, in his manual on preaching Lenski compared preachers to musicians that make dynamic choices for the sake of communication:

> Again, the preacher, in transmitting the divine truth to his hearers, resembles a fine musician. That is because he must employ the medium of living speech. There is constant movement, the flow of speech. Now the flow will be calm and measured, then it will rise and grow intense with power. There are all kinds of variations, but all of them directed at one goal, namely, the heart of the hearer . . . [Furthermore] the sermon must use the art of rhetoric. While Homiletics demands a thorough knowledge of rhetoric, from the art of composing a complete discourse down to the details of choice of words, etc., Homiletics cannot teach rhetoric, just as it requires, but does not teach logic, psychology, languages and other branches of learning which every preacher should know.[6]

As artists, therefore, the work of the preacher cannot be reduced to the content they convey, or flattened to the simple recitation of scripture as if it were incantation.

The LCMS trains its preachers in homiletics because they recognize their craft matters.

The second response to hearer intransigence, the use of more direct and intense methods of confrontation, is just as untenable as disparaging pastoral agency. This approach encourages the preacher to succumb to the worldly temptation of engaging in the rhetoric of power: the power of outrage, the power of condemnation, and the power of institutional control[7], which tend to result in forceful, spiteful and angrily direct battles.

In regard to the power of outrage, Jeffrey Gibbs offered a warning in his article "The Myth of 'Righteous Anger'—What The Bible Says About Human Anger":

> I am quite convinced that the United States of America in the twenty-first century is a profoundly angry culture, and in contemporary discourse anger (often labeled outrage") is almost regarded as a virtue. When someone with whom we agree "goes off on" someone with whose position we disagree, we applaud the anger, the belittling, the demeaning words.[8]

Therefore, *even if* the conscience of the preacher rightly distinguishes the law, the law itself is not lived out until one blesses one's enemies.[9] In contrast, the apostle Paul taught:

> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:19–21)

Rather than stand *opposed* to the hearer in the preaching of the law, preachers can work to awaken the law written *in the hearts of their hearers*. Even while a hearer's personal sin and subversive cultural formation obscure the informed conscience, the preacher can appeal to God's law which is indelibly written in the heart of humankind.[10] Once again made aware of sin through the preaching of the law the hearer will naturally feel its weight. As Luther put it:

Once again made aware of sin through the preaching of the law the hearer will naturally feel its weight.

> This knowledge of sin, moreover, is not some sort of speculation or an idea which the mind thinks up for itself. It is a true feeling, a true experience [*versus sensus, vera experientia*], and a very

> serious struggle of the heart . . . the knowledge of sin is itself the feeling of sin [*cognito peccati est ipse sensus peccati*][11]

In regard to the power of condemnation, there is a way in which this direct, angry and reprimanding approach might be understood as the result of a genuine misunderstanding regarding the terror of the law. Indeed, as Melanchthon formulated in his *Loci Communes* (1521): "The law terrifies, the gospel consoles." Importantly, however, while the law results in "terrors of conscience," it is not the pastor who manufactures such terror, rather, it is a natural resonance of the awareness of guilt brought on by the preaching of the law *with* the law written on the human heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. As Zahl put it: "theological doctrines are not just truth claims, but also function to shape and generate patterns of affective experience."[13] The preacher need only use the law to bring about the awareness of sin in the context of the biblical construct of law and gospel. Then, we can declare with Luther that "when the Law shows us our sin, our past life immediately comes to our mind. Then the sinner, in his great anguish of mind, groans and says to himself: "Oh, how damnably I have lived!'"[14]

The pastor need not leverage the rhetoric of terror or condemnation, as was employed through the preaching of the Second Great Awakening. This terror is the proper work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the preacher, conversely, is to bring about *awareness*. What is being argued here is that terror may not be the best rhetorical device to bring about the awareness of sin. As Zahl argued, "the conviction of sin is a work proper to the Holy Spirit. It is in this work of the Spirit that 'the sinner is discovered to himself' as the Spirit exposes and diagnoses the reality of sin through the instrument of the law."[15] Furthermore, while the preacher is entrusted with the office of preaching, he nevertheless speaks as one also under the law, so the preacher's guilt is also unearthed by the law he preaches. Troeger and Tisdale put it this way in *A Sermon Workbook*:

> When preachers stand with the people under the word of God, rather than opposite the people armed with the word of God, the whole tone of the sermon shifts. The preacher no longer stands in an accusatory role, bringing a word of judgment from God upon a recalcitrant people. Rather, the preacher places himself or herself on the same level as the people as 'we' wrestle together with God's offensive word that judges all.[16]

The fact that the law cannot be leveraged against the hearer without being leveraged against the preacher disarms the power of condemnation.

Finally, much has been said regarding culture's resistance to the power of institutional religion. In a cultural setting of resistance to power, many will mishear coercive alignment to institutional religion as institutional oppression and abuse.[17]

Preachers, as the church's poetic artists, are invited to evoke meaning rather than exert it.

Such abuse, indeed, has been felt and revealed in twenty-first-century North American experience. To explore this theme further, consider the Christianity Today podcast *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*, or watch the 2022 documentary *Hillsong: A Mega-Church Exposed*. The many examples of proponents of Christianity in the United States using the law to cover up abuse rather than expose it have left appeals to institutional alignment without any real power. When the law is preached as ecclesiastical power, the preacher inadvertently bypasses a more impactful and genuine hearing of the law which is brought on through self-reflection.

All three of these techniques of power (outrage, condemnation, and institutional control) are, by their nature, what Dorothy Sayers considered to be corrupt "pseudoart." Sayers thought such top-down approaches of power should be avoided on ethical grounds:

> Let her [the church] by all means encourage artists to express their own Christian experience and communicate it to others. That is the true artist saying: "Look! Recognize your experience in my own." But "edifying art" may only too often be this pseudoartist corruptly saying: "This is what you are supposed to believe and feel and do—and I propose to work you into a state of mind in which you believe and feel and do as you are told." This pseudoart does not really communicate power to us; it merely exerts power over us.[18]

Preachers, as the church's poetic artists, are invited to evoke meaning rather than exert it. We will see that Brueggemann's approach to poetic preaching satisfies Sayers's concern that art does not exert power over those it engages, but rather encourage reflecting upon the art so that in it one recognizes one's own experience.

We are therefore left with the third response to hearer intransigence: to explore new methods of preaching the law which can more effectively unearth the guilt of our hearers. One such method can be found in the work of Old Testament rhetorical critic Walter Brueggemann, especially in his works *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation and Texts That Linger, Words That Explode: Listening to Prophetic Voices,* where he makes insightful observations about preaching as a poetic craft. This poetic approach contributes to an understanding of preaching the law in a postmodern context because it relies on the awakening of the hearers through its means of self-reflection on objects of law rather than the imposition of reality through top-down authoritarian appeals or fits of intensity or anger.

We now return to Walter Brueggeman's work and draw out four characteristics

of what he conceived to be poetic prophetic preaching. He argued poetic prophetic preaching involves: (1) a prophet becomes aware of a community's hidden and unaddressed guilt, and (2) poetically construes a message that combats "prose reductionism" which (3) offers a vision of an alternative reality, (4) allowing for a recurrent eruption of meaning and reflection.

Brueggeman's vision of prophetic preaching begins specifically with the prophet's awareness of a community's hidden and unaddressed guilt. Here the preacher's role is to help the community notice the guilt and reestablish ethical congruity with the divine. Brueggeman wrote:

> Israel has become incongruous with the God who creates, loves, and summons. Communion with God has become impossible. Israel, however, does not notice, and has not noticed for so long that Israel is immobilized and cannot respond, even in shame. Israel buries the incongruity and the loss of wholeness and settles for pretense . . . Israel did not notice. The poet notices though and cannot remain silent. The preacher must address that which is buried, because even when hidden, the alienation remains powerful and destructive. Guilt lingers unnoticed. It reduces us to automatons: weary, cynical, resigned. Resignation causes failed communication. Not only do we not talk to Fidel Castro, having ended diplomatic relations, but we also do not talk to wife or husband or children either. We have been over the same ground of buried guilt so many times and accepted it in our lives so long we have labeled it "normalcy." We come on Sunday morning with a desperate yearning to move past that lingering immobilization. Guilt, unaddressed, will finally kill. We come to church even in our convinced secularity. We know that alienation must be addressed, and we yearn to have it addressed. We still faintly recall that God is indeed God. The surface fact that I may believe only in a diminished God does not keep the burden of alienation and the yearning for forgiveness from operating powerfully in my life. Even in our failure to blush, we yearn for the incongruity to be overcome.[19]

Critically, in this model the preacher does not *put* the guilt into the community through the proclamation of the law. Rather, the preacher helps the community *unearth* guilt that has been buried, ignored, and normalized. This approach resonates deeply with President Harrison's use of Walther: "Do not hesitate to preach the Law! People may despise it, yet they do so only with your mouths, because the things you say when preaching the Law are the same things that their own conscience preaches to them every day."[20] When the prophetic preacher uses the law he knows he has a

partner in the human conscience.

Second, Brueggeman described poetic preaching as a way to "maintain a possibility of genuine humaneness" and resist prose reductionism. Conversely, by poetry he does not mean

> "rhyme, rhythm, or meter" but "language that moves like Bob Gibson's fast ball, that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion, and pace. Poetic speech is the only proclamation worth doing in a situation of reductionism, the only proclamation, I submit, that is worthy of the name preaching. Such preaching is not moral instruction or problem solving or doctrinal clarification. It is not good advice, nor is it romantic caressing, nor is it a soothing good humor."[21]

Brueggemann's concern is that the "world . . . is organized in settled formulae, so that even pastoral prayers and love letters sound like memos."

The process of unearthing suppressed guilt is a sensitive one—Brueggemann therefore is concerned about a humane approach that considers imaginative dynamics:

> After the engineers, inventors, and scientists, after all such control through knowledge, "finally comes the poet." [This is a Walt Whitman quote with which Brueggemann is working]. The poet does not come to have a say until the human community has engaged in its best management. Then perchance comes the power of poetry—shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities . . . The continuing practice of this artistic speech voiced in the prophetic construal of the Bible is the primary trust of the church and its preaching. This speech prevents our reduced world from becoming brutal and coldly closed upon us. This speech, entrusted to and practiced by the church, is an act of relentless hope; an argument against the ideological closing of life we unwittingly embrace.[22]

Brueggeman held out hope that the poetic prophetic preacher could awaken the conscience of self-isolating humanity. He sees the prophetic preacher offering something substantially different in a prose-saturated world:

> When the music stops and the rheostat is turned down, then there is this precious, awesome moment of speech. It is not time for cleverness or novelty. It is not time for advice or scolding or urging, because the text is not any problem-solving answer or a flat, ideological agent that can bring resolve. This moment of speech

> is a poetic rendering in a community that has come all too often to expect nothing but prose. It is a prose world for all those who must meet payrolls and grade papers and pump gas and fly planes. When the text, too, has been reduced to prose, life becomes so prosaic that there is a dread dullness that besets the human spirit. We become mindless conformists or angry protesters, and there is no health in us. We become so beaten by prose that only poetic articulation has a chance to let us live. Into this situation, in this moment, the preacher must speak.[23]

The poetic proclamation of the law brings to the surface guilt that has gone unnoticed, ignored, or has been habituated so deeply into life that it has become unexamined.

Whereas prose reductionism presents a reduced world that tends to close in on us, there is a way in which Brueggeman saw poetically construed prophecy as "daring, liberated, and unaccommodating"[24]. In this paradigm law preaching is not just a "tell it as it is" experience but considers the dynamics of beauty and rhetoric.

Third, Brueggeman argued that prophetic preaching offers an alternate vision of reality. He thought this awakening took place *both* in terms of the law and in terms of the gospel. Brueggeman thought the law was vision as disclosing that which has gone unnoticed:

> the preacher is called to weave an artistic connection between the text in its elusive, liberated truth, and the congregation in its propensity to hear the text in forms of reductionism. That task requires articulation of a great truth in the text that may be unnoticed reality in the congregation—unnoticed, or noticed and rejected, or routinized. Preaching makes it possible for something that has been closed to be powerfully disclosed. My concern here is with the powerful reality of guilt and the more powerful reality of healing. The artistry of the preacher must disclose both the power of guilt and of healing, and then lead the congregation through the delicate transaction whereby healing overcomes and overrides guilt.[25]

Therefore, the poetic proclamation of the law brings to the surface guilt that has gone unnoticed, ignored, or has been habituated so deeply into life that it has become unexamined. Brueggeman describes the process of noticing that which had previously

gone unnoticed through the work of the poetic preacher:

> This speech of God is not a harangue. It is the poet's bold glimpse into the heart of God. The poet enables us to see that God notices how we live and is deeply troubled. If God has noticed so clearly that we act in destructive ways, then I also am free to notice—to stop the pretense . . . My life is diminished because I have not noticed or cared or responded. I cannot afford to notice because it hurts too much, it unsettles, and it frightens. Yet when God notices, I remember to blush as I have not done, because now I am in the presence of one who is embarrassed for me and with me. Perhaps the first sign that the numbness may subside is given at the throne when I blush deeply again, for the first time in a long time. I blush in the presence of the God who is so troubled over me. I learn, as I had forgotten, that my life has moral significance at the throne of God. I am permitted to blush as I have not for a long time. The blushing is evoked by the seriousness with which God regards me.[26]

The poetic preacher uses the goodness of the law to help us notice the ways in which our lives lead us to blush before the throne of God.

Brueggemann conceived of the gospel as a new vision of reality—an outside voice that leads us to an encounter with the self-giving God. Whereas the law resonates from within, the gospel is received from the outside as a declaration of good news:

> What the priests in ancient Israel know is that the ache that is left from guilt, even after reparations, cannot be removed by good works, by willpower, by positive thinking, or by romantic psychology. The ache can be removed only by entry into the sphere of the holy, which is not easy or obvious. We cannot give enough to resolve the guilt. Such guilt requires the self-giving of God.[27]

For Brueggeman, poetic preaching that inspires self-reflection and invites the hearer into a new dimension of hope is the primary trust of the church and its preaching.

Lastly, Brueggeman understood the texts of prophetic protest to be a location for future reinterpretation, imagination, and engagement:

> It is by the ongoing enterprise of religious and scholarly communities that the text lingers over time in available ways. Out of that lingering, however, from time to time, words of the text characteristically erupt into new usage. They are seized upon by someone in the community with daring. Or perhaps better, the words of the text seize someone in the community who is a candidate for daring. In that moment of re-utterance, the present

> is freshly illuminated, reality is irreversibly transformed. The community comes to know or see or receive or decide afresh. What has been tradition, hovering in dormancy, becomes available experience.[28]

The poetic nature of Old Testament text, therefore, lends to its reinterpretation in subsequent generations as the community reflects on the Scriptures in their own context. See the appendix for an example of longevity through poetic construal in the reception of Rachel in Jeremiah 31:15.

While Walter Brueggemann, as we have seen, has made several insightful observations about preaching as a poetic craft, his work is so deeply rooted in the analysis of the Old Testament prophets that it leaves open questions of how to apply them today. The use of the theory of satire to analyze the street artist Banksy's work *Love is in the Bin*, however, reveals that the law can be winsomely preached as a type of Horatian satire in our time. In particular, the ability of visual art to engage its viewer in self-reflection supplements Brueggeman's Old Testament rootedness with a method to direct twenty-first-century practice.

Banksy is a poetic prophetic preacher in the tradition of Brueggemann. As a reminder, Brueggemann's four characteristics of prophetic preaching involve (1) a prophet that becomes aware of a community's hidden and unaddressed guilt, and (2) poetically construes a message that combats "prose reductionism" which (3) offers a vision of an alternative reality, (4) allowing for a recurrent eruption of meaning and reflection. The satirical work of Banksy fits cleanly into these categories, allowing us to see Banksy's work as a model for prophetic preaching in the twenty-first century.

First, Banksy has an awareness of a community's hidden and unaddressed guilt, in particular, the art community's approach to the commodification of works of art. For Banksy, art is not a mere means to economic gain: "Capitalism, imperialism, greed, and war are Banksy's primary targets, which segue into issues of morality, accountability, culpability, legitimacy, value and values, law and regulation, all of which he tackles with dark humor."[29] In fact, Banksy himself "has often made clear that he doesn't like his work selling for so much money."[30] In contrast, the art community treats art as the exclusive property of the mega-rich. Banksy is aware of the art community's unaddressed guilt and through *Love is in the Bin* offered them the opportunity to reflect on and address their culpability in structures of inequality.

Banksy has an awareness of a community's hidden and unaddressed guilt, in particular, the art community's approach to the commodification of works of art.

Second, in *Love is in the Bin* Banksy communicates with a poetic construal that combats prose reductionism; Banksy didn't brazenly confront the art world like a street preacher on demonstration, but instead he demonstrated intentionality of tact and craft; he creates art, which by its very nature invites self-reflection through dialogue with the art. He could have stalked the entrance to the auction house with a descriptive sign or thrown paint on the proponents of exclusivity and excess as they entered the building, but instead he aimed to add value to society in an attempt to elucidate these unaddressed cultural sins. Lindsay Baker put it succinctly when she wrote: "His works showing two kissing policemen, for instance, or his rioter poised to throw a bunch of flowers as if it were a bomb, are typical of his style—subversive, yet always with a touch of humanity and wry humour. As the artist himself has put it: 'I want to show that money hasn't crushed the humanity out of everything.'"[31] Banksy's work provoked self-reflection and humaneness.

Let's discuss *Love is in the Bin* in more detail: on October 5, 2018, just as Sotheby's auction house sold Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* for well over one million dollars, an electronic signal sent the painting through a secretly embedded paper shredder hidden in the frame. It became the first ever artwork created at a live auction, and it challenges traditional themes of permanence, reverence, ownership/copyright, objectification, memorialization, and commodification. In the act of destruction Banksy shifted the appreciation of beauty from its price tag to the way it serves as a prophetic lens into our reality.

Banksy is at war with value systems that promote exclusivity of access or unethical power dynamics—he came to prominence as a graffiti artist in the early 1990s. In her article for the *Telegraph* entitled "How Banksy turned the wry wit of his home town into million-dollar art," Lindsay Baker depicts Banksy's hometown of Bristol as a creative city of misfit artists who play for the love of the game—culturally it has "its own distinctive view of the world and a peculiarly strong sense of its own humour and identity."[32] Importantly, graffiti was used throughout the 1990s as "a means for public expression and discontent," with the "capacity to bring into sharp focus ethical concerns, challenge contemporary values, give voice to shared anxieties, and express a desire for human justice and freedom."[33] The Bristol mindset was "Fluffy but defiant" as embodied by Banksy's famous graffiti of a teddy bear facing off with riot cops.[34] Many find this cheeky, playful way of fighting back refreshing, non-aggressive, and mesmerizing. For Banksy, art is not a mere means to economic gain: "capitalism, imperialism, greed, and war are Banksy's primary targets, which segue into issues of morality, accountability, culpability, legitimacy, value and values, law and regulation, all of which he tackles with dark humor."[35] Banksy offers his critique through visual poetry, not the angry and harsh words of prose-reductionism.

Third, through his art Banksy offers a vision of an alternative reality. On Oct 3, 2019, Banksy posted the following on Instagram:

> Record price for a Banksy painting set at auction tonight. Shame I didn't still own it. [He posted the following as an attached image] "'Art should make us feel more clearly and more intelligently. It should give us coherent sensations that we otherwise would not have had. But the price of a work of art is now part of its function, its new job is to sit on the wall and get more expensive. Instead of being common property of humankind the way a book is, art becomes the particular property of somebody who can afford it. Suppose that every worthwhile book in the world cost $1million—imagine what a catastrophic effect on culture that would have.' Robert Hughes, Art critic"[36]

Banksy's alternate reality is a world in which art is available to the world to help us see and feel more clearly as it breaks us out of our self-isolation and prose-reductionism. Paul Myhre contended that

> those associated with this contemporary movement are concerned more about the provocation of conversation and a systemic ethical shift toward the valuation of human and non-human rights. In short it is largely about challenging human values, systems of ethics, unjust political and social realities local and global, and the rights of all things living. It is a visual revolution rising from creative hands belonging to those marginalized and oppressed by political, social, economic, and religious systems.[37]

Banksy's vision of an alternative reality is in the restoration of humanity beyond prose-reductionism and a world undominated, marginalized, and oppressed.

Finally, Banksy's *Love is in the Bin* meets Brueggemann's criteria of a poetically construed prophetic message that erupts in recurrent meaning. For Banksy this meant contextualizing *Love is in the Bin* in as a prophetic protest against commodification, which, upon reflection, is simply an iteration of its original intent. Before its iconic destruction, Banksy's *Girl With Balloon* first appeared at Waterloo Bridge and then in other locations around London—even as a social protest in 2005 regarding the West Bank barrier. Paul Myhre contended that:

> contextually produced art—Street Art—is often, at its most fundamental level, about visual theological depictions or visual ethical convictions that aim to spark viewers imaginations about ideas, values, beliefs, hopes, and meaning making in order to open up theological and ethical reflection for dialogue about what might matter most.[38]

In other words, both prophetic preaching in the flavor of Brueggeman and Banksy creates a memorable presentation that has a chance to become embedded in the community and received again at a later date. Today, prophetic preaching can be used to reimagine and apply prophetic texts of Scripture to their own context as Scripture speaks anew to a new context.

In the interest of establishing Banksy as a meaningful conversation partner with Brueggeman's view of the poetic prophetic preacher, we have seen the ways in which Banksy, as a visual artist, fits into this tradition. Let us now turn to consider the ways in which preachers, in turn, fit into the tradition of visual artists. Many philosophers and theologians have argued convincingly that hearers make mental images in response to that which they have heard. Martin Luther put it this way:

> Of this I am certain, that God desires to have his works heard and read, especially the passion of our Lord. But it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God . . . however, I must cease lest I hereby give occasion to the image-breakers never to read the Bible, or to burn it, and after that to tear the heart out of the body, because they are so opposed to images.[40]

As words create pictures on the hearts of the hearers, the preacher's rhetoric contributes to the kind of images that are evoked, and the way in which the hearer will respond to the proclamation of the law. In their chapter "Addressing Congregational Resistances through Preaching" in *A Sermon Workbook*, Thomas Troeger and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale put forth the following technique: "Honor what people consider sacred and beautiful, and use it as a source of transformative power."[41] Troeger and Tisdale's work on the use of the sacred and beautiful as a source of transformative power resonates with Picasso's insight about art: "We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth . . . The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies."[42]

While the rhetoric of power exerts meaning, the rhetoric of beauty tries to evoke it. Poetry, after all, leaves room for the Spirit to apply law and gospel to the hearer and work with that power.[43] For as Zahl argued, "Luther and Melancthon both understand experiential encounter with the law in terms of the agency of the Holy Spirit. When

the law is 'used' to reveal sin and effect terror, the 'user' is God the Spirit."[44] Martin Luther put it starkly: "There's no man living on earth who knows how to distinguish between the law and the gospel. We may think we understand it when we are listening to a sermon, but we're far from it. Only the Holy Spirit knows this."[45] Therefore the prophetic preacher of the law is hereby invited to use poetic speech, according to Brueggemann, in an attempt to break fixed conclusions as an act of relentless hope, inviting the Holy Spirit to wield the law to awaken the soul. The prophetic preacher knows to leave room for the Holy Spirit to convict the hearer by means of divinely guided self-reflection on the law through poetic construal.

Consider as an example of poetic preaching the way in which Nathan preached the law to David after David committed adultery and murder. Picture the scene: David, the great king of Israel, sits contentedly on his throne in Jerusalem. He is pleased with his new wife Bathsheba and their newborn son as they grew accustomed to life in the palace. It looks, however, as though David's egregious transgression against his community had gone unnoticed—you would have had no idea that David had just recently committed adultery with Bathsheba, conceived a son with her, and ordered the death of Uriah her husband to cover it up. Into this circumstance, however, comes Nathan the prophet, the prophetic preacher. Knowing he has to confront David for his sin and evil, Nathan takes time to formulate his approach. He will not brazenly confront the king like a street preacher on demonstration, but instead he will demonstrate intentionality of tact and craft; he artfully welcomes the king into a common narrative, awakening him to self-correction brought on by means of self-reflection.

The prophetic preacher knows to leave room for the Holy Spirit to convict the hearer by means of divinely guided self-reflection on the law through poetic construal.

The rest of the story is well-known. In 2 Samuel 12 the prophetic preacher Nathan poetically tells David of a rich man who, despite having many lambs of his own, fed a traveler his neighbor's only lamb. He did this knowing his neighbor was poor and treated this lamb like a daughter. Moved by this example of injustice, David's anger burned against the rich man, and he pronounced severe judgment upon him: the payment of four lambs and death. Nathan then revealed to David that in what he had done to Uriah and Bathsheba he had been that rich man. David was immediately self-aware. Nathan was an effective poetic prophetic preacher for he was able to unearth David's guilt and give him the opportunity of confession and forgiveness. Upon examination we discover that Nathan was using a form of Horatian satire with

Poetic prophetic preaching as satire is attempting to bring to light the hearer's hidden guilt.

David, which, as it so happens, is the type of satire Banksy used in *Love is in the Bin*. It is Horatian Satire then, that we will consider as a way to direct Brueggemann's into twenty-first-century practice.

Horace gave us a model of satire "which he modestly called a *sermo* (Strikingly, this is the Latin root of our English word "sermon"!)."[46] Horatian satire is a type of satire that invites conversation, as opposed to Juvenalian satire which closes off conversation and simply invokes condemnation. Juvenalian satire "is no longer a conversation among like-thinking equals but the savage indignation of a lone survivor."[47] Prophetic preaching like this is common today, for much of twenty-first century prophetic preaching is railing against the way in which *the world* lives in opposition to the church's foundational narrative. If we are not careful, this is what modern law preaching can become in our churches.

There are a few methods available to practitioners of Horatian satire, three of which are laid out by Joshua Carlisle Harzman in his thesis *Urban Scrawl: Satire as Subversion in Banksy's Graphic Discourse*.[48] These methods are put forth here as a tool with which to structure the preaching of the law, methods that acknowledge that individuals don't receive reality, but they construct meaning. Let us make a few observations about satire, however, before we examine the tools. First, "satire, loosely defined as the intersection of humor and politics, is a particularly effective method at publicly airing grievances."[49] Hence it is used as an instrument of the law. Second, "satire does not need to single-handedly dismantle an ideology for its employment to be deemed a success. Rather, the identification of previously hidden or disguised oppressive concepts by audiences is a success in the expansion of social consciousness."[50] Hence the presence of variant reception of poetic prophetic preaching is normalized. Third, "satire is supposed to be entertaining but the subversive element makes the purpose of satire greater than sole amusement . . . I define satire as a historically located, humorous criticism for the purpose of creating new knowledge.[51] Hence, poetic prophetic preaching as satire is attempting to bring to light the hearer's hidden guilt. Finally, Harzman contends that "when audiences are able to see dominant institutions from new perspectives, it can cause 'atom-cracking' in which old ideologies fall to make way for new ones. These institutions do not need to immediately fall for this discourse to be considered successful. Rather, simply the creation of this new, critical knowledge is valuable in advancing a democratic society."[52] Note how these categories speak to the success of Banksy's *Love is in the Bin* irrespective of the complete destruction of the ideology with which he was opposed. Satire allows for incremental change through the chipping away of ideologies incongruous with the prophet's view of ethics.

Now we turn to Harzman's three methods: (1) mimicry, (2) historical revision, and (3) strategic juxtaposition. All three attempt to use rhetorical embellishment to awaken the consciousness of the hearer. First, mimicry involves creative exaggeration that reveals an unrecognized truth and gives " the capacity to judge whether it represents . . . [one's] own condition."[53] The exaggeration allows for hearers to question their own ideology through the condemnation of the exaggeration. We see this technique throughout the biblical prophets, for example, in Nathan's confrontation of David, discussed above, and Isaiah's spoiled loincloth, whereas God spoke the law in conjunction with the image: "Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem" (Jer 13:9).

Second, historical revision offers a "contextual locus for audiences to understand the ideologies being called forth for interrogation, historical revision provides an incongruous juxtaposition with that ideology to actually illustrate the faults hidden amongst its hegemony."[54] Through historical revision the poetic prophetic preacher again awakens the hearer to the curiosities of his own age, or in an age significant to the development of the perceived incongruity. Historical revision offers "a critical reimagining of a history that was oppressive to particular cultures."[55] Through historical revision, for example, the prophets often recalled themes of the exodus to understand and interpret events in their own time.

Finally, strategic juxtaposition, like historical revision, "positions two incongruous concepts in contrast with one another." This technique "emphasizes a cognitive dissonance between worldviews that audiences experience when asked to simultaneously consider two conflicting realities."[56] Through strategic juxtaposition, for example, the prophet Jeremiah comforted the people when he bought a plot of land in Judah just as it was to be taken over by the Babylonians (Jer 32).

Banksy did not stand on a street corner with a sign that read "art isn't about money, it's about its capacity to humanize us through self-reflection"; this would be prose-reductionism and unlikely to be successful at unearthing the art community's guilt. Instead, through strategic juxtaposition, Banksy made something that "raises questions that need an airing . . . that holds 'the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.'[57] Banksy's "shred that was seen around the world,"[58] therefore, stands as an artistic symbol of hope that, as Brueggemann said about prophetic preaching, "breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities."[59]

This, then, is Brueggemann's invitation to the modern preaching office. A few loose threads remain, however, for example, more work needs to be done to bridge this theory of law preaching with modern satirical technique. One such conversation partner might include Dustin Griffin's *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, who considers the critical problems in satire, including issues of variant reception and interpretation.

A second conversation could provide examples of Horatian satire in exemplar sermons. David Schmitt suggested a third conversation: how does the poetic prophetic preacher avoid lampoon and slander? Furthermore, I expect that this approach to preaching the law might go a long way in changing the nature of fraternal debates within the clergy of the LCMS. While unaddressed guilt seems to be at the heart of prophetic protest from movements like #churchtoo, Lutherans for Racial Justice, and opponents of liturgical adaptation, I do not think Horatian satire is currently a significant component of their message. Perhaps this would be helpful rhetoric for the groups listed above.

Instead, preachers are herein invited to think poetically in their construal of the law, their task being to awaken self-consciousnesses to hidden guilt. Anger results in the hearer digging even further into the position, but satire has a way to break through defenses. The law, after all, is good—it is God's call to bring what Brueggeman might call our "unaddressed incongruity" to the surface to be dealt with. To this end the techniques of Horatian satire might be employed in the tradition of the poetic protest artist Banksy, as preachers winsomely call forth our hidden guilt to be met with the light and grace of Jesus Christ.

Appendix: an example of how the poetic construal of Rachel becomes a font of recurring prophetic preaching.

> When the tradition of Jeremiah wants to articulate this unrestrained grief most fully, it recruits mother Rachel, from Genesis, to lead the voicing of grief:
>
> > A voice is heard in Ramah,
> > lamentation and bitter weeping.
> > Rachel is weeping for her children;
> > she refuses to be comforted for her children,
> > because they are not. (Jer 31:15)
>
> Again, the Jeremiah tradition is on the receiving end of the traditioning process, for its poetry clearly appeals back to Genesis. In Genesis 37, with the alleged death of Joseph, it is father Jacob, not mother Rachel, who "refused to be comforted" (v. 35). In taking over this tradition of grief for the loss of the beloved from Genesis, however, the refusal of comfort has been reassigned to mother Rachel. The Genesis text has lingered, and now it explodes in the tradition of Jeremiah.It explodes in remarkable imagination.

This imaginative act is remarkable because of the transference of grief to mother Rachel, for mother, in that ancient world as in the contemporary world, can characteristically grieve more effusively for lost, treasured sons than can anyone else. The imaginative act of transference, however, is more than this. It is that the Jacob-Rachel-Joseph reference from Genesis should be used at all in this new context. That old story apparently had lingered in Israel's memory, and now it erupts with odd poignancy. In the poetic scenario in Jeremiah where mother Rachel makes her belated reappearance, the tradition mobilizes the entire history of the ancestors, all the long-gone witnesses who watch over Israel in caring, enduring anxiety.[60]

It is by the ongoing enterprise of religious and scholarly communities that the text lingers over time in available ways. Out of that lingering, however, from time to time, words of the text characteristically erupt into new usage. They are seized upon by someone in the community with daring. Or perhaps better, the words of the text seize someone in the community who is a candidate for daring. In that moment of re-utterance, the present is freshly illuminated, reality is irreversibly transformed. The community comes to know or see or receive or decide afresh. What has been tradition, hovering in dormancy, becomes available experience. In the moment of speaking and hearing, this is treasured tradition now become present experience, inimitable, without parallel, irreversible. In that utterance, the word does lead reality.[61]

Endnotes

1 Matthew Harrison, "Preaching Law and Gospel in Times of Trial," *Lutheran Witness,* February 1, 2022, https://witness.lcms.org/2022/preaching-law-and-gospel-in-times-of-trial/.

2 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 164.

3 Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 45.

4 Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 150–151.

5 John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, MO; Concordia Publishing House, 1945), 78.

6 R. C. H Lenski, *The Sermon - Its Homiletical Construction* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern), 70–71.

7 This precise categorization: "outrage, condemnation, and institutional control," was helpfully suggested by David Schmitt, Gregg H. Benidt Memorial Professor of Homiletics and Literature at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

8 Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Myth Of 'Righteous Anger' What The Bible Says About Human Anger" (*Concordia Pages* at Concordia Theology), 4. Cf. Erik Herrmann: "According to [Leonard] Sweet we are not experiencing a post-scale technological world. To understand what this means, let's use the technology of a weapon as an analogy. The advance from the club to a spear is to scale up . . . scale up further and we move to the bow and the arrow, and then to the crossbow, and then to the musket. In each of these examples. But as you continue to move up the scale from gun, to bazooka, to missile, to atomic bomb, you have suddenly crossed a threshold in which the old ethics and standards have become unusable. You've gone post-scale, and a whole new set of questions and problems arise. So it is, I think, now with social media — it has weaponized the tongue. It has transformed the unholy fire of gossip and slander into a weapon of mass destruction. Facebook comments and blog posts have now become the means by which people, and groups, and institutions can easily and without risk be vilified and slandered, and denigrated, and mocked . . . We might think we are doing good by our 3 o'clock in the morning arguments, battling false views, heresies even — but we are not. (Chapel Sermon by Erik Herrmann from Isaiah 5:1–7 on Friday, October 2, 2020. https://scholar.csl.edu/cs1718/156/. 7:00ff (last accessed 1/31/22)).

9 See Luther's explanation of the fifth commandment: "The meaning of this commandment, then, is that no one should harm another person for any evil deed, no matter how much that person deserves it." (Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 411.)

10 To refer to subversive cultural formation was helpfully suggested by David Schmitt.

11 WA 40:2326-7; LW 12:310. From Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020), 160.

12 "*Lex terret, evangelium consolatur. Lex irae vox est it mortis, evangelium pacit et vitae. MW* 2.1:83; Melancthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, p.103" in Zahl, *The Holy Spirit*, 165.

13 Zahl, *The Holy Spirit*, 146.

14 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 26 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 5.

15 Zahl, *The Holy Spirit*, 181.

16 Thomas Troeger and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *A Sermon Workbook* (Nashville; TN, Abingdon Press, 2013), 98.

17 This insight was offered by David Schmitt.

18 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Toward a Christian Esthetic" in *The Whimsical Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 166.

19 Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 16–17.
20 Harrison "Law and Gospel."
21 Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 3.
22 Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 6–7.
23 Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 9–10.
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25 Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 13.
26 Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 20–21.
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34 Baker, "How Banksy."
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36 An Instagram post made by Banksy on Oct 3, 2019.
37 Myhre, "Visual Art as Revolutionary Power," 23.
38 Myhre, "Visual Art as Revolutionary Power," 23.
39 In a more humorous connection, consider that just as prophets were met with variant reception by their hearers, as Isaiah was warned explicitly (Is 6:9–10) and Jesus quotes in Matthew 14:14, *Love is in the Bin* received variant reception—from being dismissed as a PR stunt to being heralded as one of the most significant artworks of the early twenty-first century.
40 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 40: Church and Ministry II, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 99–101.
41 Thomas Troeger and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *A Sermon Workbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 101.
42 Pablo Picasso, "Picasso Speaks: A Statement by the Artist" in *The Arts: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Covering All Phases of Ancient and Modern Art,* vol. 3, no. 5, (New York: The Arts Publishing Corporation, 1923): 315.
43 The juxtaposition with the power as outrage, condemnation, and institutional control to leaving room for the power of the Holy Spirit was an insight brought out by David Schmitt.
44 Zahl, *The Holy Spirit*, 168.
45 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54: Table Talk, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 127.
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The Dream and the Dreaming
Australian Christianity, Aboriginal Spirituality, and Martin Luther King Jr.

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Introduction

My daughter came home from school in Australia one day with questions for me after having learned about the Australian Aboriginal "dreaming" stories. These are the stories of Australia's Indigenous people which narrate how life came to be and are essential to the way they see the world. We will return to these later. My daughter had also learned at home and church how the Christian Scriptures tell of this world and our lives coming to be, and she wanted to know how these fit together. This scene from the everyday life of an Australian family illustrates an inherent tension in Australian society generally, and the Christian church in particular, as to the relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality. It is a tension which is also on full display in the most unlikely of places, namely a giant mural in Newtown, Sydney. The mural refers to the famous "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. and has been modified in interesting and significant ways over the years, including the addition of an Aboriginal flag and traditional dot painting. It is this mural we will explore in this paper, especially in order to reflect on the relationship between Australian Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality.

In analyzing the mural as an example of creative cultural production arising from King's original speech, I will argue that the mural reveals the way a local community appropriated King's inspiration and message which derived from a Christian heritage, whilst also contextualizing and subverting it in relation to Indigenous spirituality. I suggest that this shows how Australians are aware of the complex and often negative

history of the relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality in Australia, but that the community has also created a space for conversation about how the two can relate to one another. After making this case, I will examine the ways in which Australian Christians have offered different approaches to these questions from a theological perspective. These differing approaches also reflect the inherent challenges and tensions. Finally, I will consider where this leaves Christians today as we work together with Aboriginal brothers and sisters in Christ.

King's Speech and the Newtown Mural

The mural in Newtown, Sydney draws inspiration from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. The speech was originally given on August 28, 1963, as part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This was a key moment in the United States Civil Rights' Movement which sought equality for Black Americans across a range of social and economic issues. The speech attended to these core issues by referring to the nation's founding documents and their promises of equality and freedom for all Americans. King also challenged the nation to meet these promises. The name of the speech arises from the most famous part of King's rhetoric that day, where he moved from analyzing the past and current situation to a vision of the future. In this "dream," freedom would reign across the land and little children of different skin colors would play side by side.[1] It is this "I have a dream" refrain which most often appears in examples of creative cultural production arising from the speech, including in the Newtown mural.

For the purposes of this study, it is particularly important to note that although King is most famous for being a civil rights leader, he was in fact a Christian minister and self-identified most strongly in this way. King is recorded as saying that "In the quiet recesses of my heart . . . I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher."[2] While some scholars have downplayed the importance of King's Christian faith, many others have argued that King is best understood in the tradition of black folk preaching.[3] This is most obvious in the fact that King's "I Have a Dream" speech contains many biblical quotations and allusions as did his rhetoric generally, but in addition to this many have noted that the speech as a whole is sermonic in nature.[4] King's civil rights work generally and his public speaking in particular has been described as "transposing the Christian themes of love, suffering, deliverance, and justice from the pulpit to public policy."[5] In other words, his Christian heritage is inextricable from his public civil rights work, not least of all his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

The second point in relation to the original speech follows from the first, this being that the nature of the dream sequence containing the refrain "I have a dream" functions as a sort of prophetic vision of hope very much in the biblical tradition.[6] In other parts of the speech King refers to secular and political documents from the past

Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

as well as everyday mundane realities. However, in this latter part of the speech he moves into a more transcendent rhetoric where he envisages a new future and invites his hearers into this vision. The importance of this element of the speech for our purposes is simply to point out that the reference to "I have a dream" in the Newtown mural carries with it a sense of transcendence deriving from the Christian tradition.

As we turn to the mural itself in more detail, we will see how this theme was further enhanced, as well as modified and resisted in significant ways. In fact, the production of the mural moved through three distinct stages of appropriation and contextualization, initial resistance and the raising of tension, and final subversion and the creative maintaining of tension. This could be seen primarily through a political and cultural lens, with the resistance being due to the dynamics of Americanization. However, I will suggest the mural's evolution is best understood on a spiritual register, which does not exclude the political and cultural issues but goes beyond them as well.

The mural was created in 1991 on a large wall in a suburb of Sydney called Newtown,[7] appropriately enough on King St.[8] This area of Sydney is known for its alternative and colorful subcultures where graffiti and street art were common. The mural is quite large covering the wall of a multistory building. As it was originally created it consisted in the main section of the face of Martin Luther King Jr. next to a globe of the earth styled on some of the first photographs from outer space from the Apollo 8 mission. The globe is rotating in space with darkness creeping across one edge. King's face is only slightly smaller than the globe and is also set against the black background. Underneath King's face and the globe are the words "I have a dream" in large, stylized, bold lettering which can be easily read from a distance. These elements all survive to this day. The original mural also contained underneath the main section a series of people from different ethnicities and walks of life together in gestures of friendship. Off to the side of the mural are the words of Genesis 37:19–20 about Joseph's brothers plotting his death and thus the end of his dreams.

What can we make of the semiotics of the original mural at first glance? The size and position of King's face adjacent to the earth point toward a sense of transcendence. Whereas King's original speech was given in a specific location and moment, the mural depicts him as a figure who is above and beyond regular time and space. The globe also suggests that his message has universal significance. The words "I have a dream" as mentioned above, also evoke an otherworldliness of sorts and give a sense of hope and positivity to the mural. The original mural containing the group of people below would seem to connect the statement of King's dream with part of its original content, namely that of little children of different skin colors playing side by side. However, in the mural's depiction the application has been broadened and contextualized to include different ethnicities and religions as would have been represented in the Newtown area of that time. A burka can be seen on one woman, and a t-shirt bearing the Aboriginal flag on another. Finally, in contrast to the note of hope and positivity, the Bible verse both enhances the Christian connection with King and his speech, as well as introducing an ominous and sobering tone. The words from Genesis about the plots against Joseph by his brothers because of his dreams have been associated with Martin Luther King Jr. by others since shortly after his assassination.[9]

In interviews on the making of the mural, the artists have spoken of the mural representing the idea that everyone is "free to be whoever you are,"[10] and have referred to environmental issues, gender equality,[11] gay rights issues, and a general attitude of tolerance which they link to the local community of Newtown.[12] Here we can see the appropriation and contextualization taking place. King's original speech was primarily concerned with racial equality in the United States and made no reference to issues of environmental issues, gender equality, or gay rights. Yet King and his message have been interpreted and utilized for wider issues deemed to be in continuity with his,

and especially important to that local community. It is also worth noting that in the artists' verbal descriptions of the meaning of the mural, the religious and spiritual elements are de-emphasized, even though they appear clearly in the mural itself.

Surprisingly, elements of the local community registered a kind of protest against the original mural. On several occasions in the weeks and months after its creation the bottom section was defaced with spray painted messages or tags. In response to this a change was made to the mural which is part of the piece as it currently exists, namely an Australian Aboriginal flag which was painted over the section at the bottom where formerly there were a group of people. This seemed to put an end to the rival graffiti. Here the mural is further contextualized, and an element of initial resistance and tension is introduced. The resistance is open to a number of interpretations. One would be that there was resistance to the importing of an American cultural icon in the mural, so that the significance of the flag was in its reference to Australia. However, the flag was not the Australian national flag but the Australian Indigenous flag, so that the more specific meaning would seem to be that the abstraction of King and his message from specifically racial issues to wider ones was deemed unacceptable by some, and so the flag more optimally connected the mural's main symbolic value not just to Australia, but to Australian racial issues. Further, here we see already resistance in the realm of the mural's transcendent and spiritual meaning. For Aboriginal Australians the flag is very closely connected to issues of land, which is bound up with their spirituality. This theme and its contrast with the globe become clearer in the next stage of the mural's evolution.

After the mural proceeded through these stages of appropriation and contextualization, then initial resistance and the raising of tension, a further addition was made off to the side which moves into subversion and the creative maintaining of the tension. This section appears to be a much later addition by others in the local community rather than the original artists.[13] It contains a traditional Aboriginal dot painting—a distinctive style readily identifiable by most Australians—with the words "We have the dreaming" painted across it. At the bottom is also a reference to the Indigenous tribal lands on which Newtown is located.[14] These additions to the mural cleverly build on, and subtly subvert, the initial version of the mural by the common vocabulary of dream and dreaming, and the juxtaposition of the globe of the whole earth with the reference to local lands. At this point it will be helpful to explore the concept of the Dreaming in Aboriginal spirituality and the importance of land in Aboriginal culture and religion.

In discussion of Australian Aboriginal culture, spirituality, and religion, one often hears references to the "Dreamtime" or simply "the Dreaming." In the first instance the Dreaming refers to the stories of what might be called prehistory, even an eternal time of sorts sometimes called "everywhen." The connotation of the name dreaming in part distinguishes this realm from our time and space as we experience

While King's dream looked to the future to find hope in the present, the Aboriginal dreaming looks to the past to find meaning in the present.

it now, something like waking from a dream into reality. However, far from being a distant reality of make-believe, for traditional Aboriginal people the Dreaming is very real and still very much with them in the here and now. In the Dreaming supernatural beings and other creatures brought shape to the physical world, human life, and the social order and law which regulate it. In these stories, often particular locations are associated with special creative activity, and those locations can come to be considered sacred and the focus of ritual activity for the people. Ancient spirits are understood to reside in animals or other natural elements of the earth involved in the Dreaming, so that the entity as we know it today, for example a kangaroo, takes on totemic significance for people and groups. In sum, the Dreaming can refer specifically to the stories and realm of prehistory, but this is by nature more comprehensive than many people may realize, and as such the Dreaming can be understood as a term to describe the Aboriginal philosophy, spirituality, and religion as a whole.[15]

The dot painting added to the Newtown mural is a typical scene from one of the Dreaming stories. This, together with the words "We have the dreaming" juxtaposed with King's "I have a dream," are clearly involved in making a statement of deep spiritual significance, rather than simply a social, political, or cultural one. The implicit statement of this addition to the mural is that at the very least the inspiration of King's dream for Australians needs to be understood in relation to Aboriginal racial issues and their own spirituality, or more strongly, that King's dream is another example of foreign intrusion and needs to be resisted as Indigenous dreaming is more important here. Another noteworthy contrast is that while King's dream looked to the future to find hope in the present, the Aboriginal dreaming looks to the past to find meaning in the present. The two are operating with significantly different ways of seeing the world.

The other issue to touch on is the importance of land, already introduced above in the mention of the significance of location in the Dreaming. It is hard to overstate this significance for Aboriginal people. In her book *Through Aboriginal Eyes*, Anne Pattel-Gray expresses it as follows,

> Only through our spiritual connection to the earth can we continue in our own identity. This is why we conceive of ourselves in terms of the land. In our view the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other living entities have origin and destiny. It is where

> our identity comes from, where our spirituality begins, where the Dreaming comes from; it is where stewardship begins.[16]

The land rights of Indigenous Australians in relation to European settlement have been an extremely difficult social and political issue through the decades. For this reason, the reference to land can sometimes be understood as primarily a political statement. However, as Pattel-Gray shows, the importance of land is interwoven in the social and religious fabric of life for Aboriginal Australians, and so the mention of tribal lands in the mural functions on a spiritual register as a subversive message over against the transcendent Christian symbolism of King adjacent the globe. Although the original mural did make a claim to local significance with the context of the Newtown community, the appropriation of King and his inspiration was not especially connected to that specific land. In other words, the mural could have been painted on a building in another suburb or city. The final addition of the Aboriginal dot painting though is fundamentally linked to the actual location and land on which the mural stands, and thus registers a spiritual protest to the original.

Before leaving the mural, a final word is in place about the original artists. This is because we see in their stories another intriguing note of ambiguity and tension in relation to the spiritual dynamics of the mural. The mural was a joint venture by Julie Pryor a local gallery owner, and Canadian street-artist Andrew Aiken. Pryor described working with Aiken as simultaneously infuriating and exciting. She said that although there were great differences between them, amazing work was produced through their partnership. At the time of their collaboration, Pryor was an Australian single mother in her forties while Aiken was a Canadian-born man in his twenties. Pryor considered herself an atheist, while Aiken was a born-again Christian.[17] To add to the intrigue, Aiken was later found guilty of murder in the United Kingdom for a crime he committed there before travelling to Australia and making the mural. Thus, the man whose Christian faith formed part of his creative impulse and saw the mural as being about positivity and bringing light in the world, was in fact hiding a very dark secret. As we will see, here is an intriguing reflection of the dynamics between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality which also involve positive and negative aspects—light, as well as darkness.

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The most interesting fact about these complex and diverse elements in the mural is that they all now exist simultaneously, and I would suggest, exist in tension. Overall, the mural draws inspiration from King

and his message which carries with it the spirit of Christianity, but not without connecting it to localized Indigenous issues including Aboriginal spirituality, which then brings tension, even incongruity one might say. The mural leaves this tension out in the open. The Aboriginal flag and later the dot painting were not, after all, painted over the original mural, but alongside it. Thus, the Newtown mural, among many other things, expresses in artistic form the complexity of the relationship between Christianity in Australia and the spirituality and religion of the Indigenous peoples. Moreover, it creates a space for asking about and exploring the nature of this relationship. We now examine ways in which Christian theologians and missionaries in Australia have attempted to speak into this space.

Christianity and Aboriginal Spirituality

Christians in Australia have carried out mission work among the Aboriginal people from soon after the time of white settlement, and today there are many thousands of Indigenous Christians who belong to various denominations and churches. As the Aboriginal people had their own spirituality and religious practices from before the coming of Christianity, the question of how these two relate has always been there and has been approached in various ways. The first was predominant among the early missionaries and is characterized by discontinuity. The second has become more popular in recent decades and is characterized by continuity. The third is, I suggest, a mediating position. To narrow the scope of the discussion I will work mainly with Australian Lutheran missionaries and theologians, both Indigenous and of European heritage.

The early Lutheran missionaries in Australia often travelled incredible distances, endured harsh conditions, and made great sacrifices in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we will see, they were people of their time and made many mistakes, but generally they are still honored among Australian Christians both of European and Aboriginal descent. Even in secular scholarship among the many critiques of their paternalism and ties to colonialism, some early Lutheran missionaries have been acknowledged for their groundbreaking linguistic work which in some cases preserved Indigenous languages which may otherwise have been lost.

Nevertheless, it is true that the early missionaries tended to have a very negative view of Aboriginal religion and culture, and often encouraged the people to stop all rituals and practices they deemed to be in any way connected to spirituality. Habel writes, "The aims of the missionaries were—broadly speaking—to Christianize and to civilize; to save the souls of the Aborigines and to convert them to the civilized way of life exemplified by the European invaders. The former goal implied, at least for most missions, a total rejection of traditional cultures, values, and lifestyles."[18] One Aboriginal woman puts it even more strongly in spiritual terms saying, "The colonizers said that we were satanic, that we worshipped idols."[19] In other words, this approach to the relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality

is characterized by discontinuity. All elements of the previous religion are viewed in contrast to Christianity, and in many instances as manifestations of evil spirits directly opposed to the Holy Spirit. A son of one of these early missionaries (whom we will discuss below in the mediating position) who generally seeks to put the best construction on missionary efforts says that missionaries "considered the Aboriginal culture to be basically pagan, and therefore hardly the wineskin capable of or suitable for holding the new wine of the gospel."[20]

Early missionaries tended to have a very negative view of Aboriginal religion and culture

In more recent decades, a movement has arisen which seeks to take a very different approach from the one outlined above, where the attempt to develop a distinctively "Aboriginal Christianity" integrates the Christian faith with traditional Indigenous culture and religion. This second approach is characterized by continuity rather than discontinuity. In other words, it seeks to find in traditional Aboriginal spirituality and religious practice that which can be combined with the Christian faith. One significant work in this area is a book called *Rainbow Spirit Theology*.[21] This book was produced after a meeting of some leading Aboriginal Christians together with some white Australian facilitators. One reviewer writes, "The notion that God accepts the aboriginal people as they are and that Christian meaning is discernible from within the basic spiritual tenets of their traditional faith and not something external and foreign to it is a strong theme running throughout this work."[22] While early missionaries engaged in various forms of enculturation and contextualization in regard to the Christian gospel, chiefly in translating Scripture, liturgy, and hymnody in the Indigenous languages, this new approach goes much further in arguing that the actual religious content and ritual of Aboriginal spirituality can be understood as legitimate and valid in its own right, and in direct continuity with the Christian faith.

A common understanding in this theological approach is to see the Old Testament as akin to the Indigenous custom and law. So, one of the key Lutheran Aboriginal leaders involved in Rainbow Spirit Theology articulates his understanding as follows, "God has spoken to our ancestors . . . He has spoken to our Aboriginal elders. He has given us the law,"[23] and again, "Our stories are teachings—teachings about this book, the Bible."[24] Notice here that the traditions and teachings of the traditional Aboriginal spirituality and religion are understood to be revelations on par with the Old Testament. The name of the work comes from a Dreaming story which is explained as follows, "Christ has been in our culture for thousands of years, perhaps not revealed as we see it in the New Testament, but he was there. The snake we call Rainbow Spirit is a symbol of that person."[25] So this approach seeks to find ways of understanding Christianity as a fulfillment of the Aboriginal dreaming, much

in the way the New Testament speaks of itself as a fulfillment of the Old. One of the concerns commonly raised by Christians to this approach is that in its desire to be sensitive and open it approaches religious syncretism[26] and so loses the exclusivity of the claims of Jesus Christ.

In addition to these two approaches, a third is something of a mediating way. Aboriginal Christian elder Djuniyini expresses this sentiment simply and well when he says, "God opens our eyes to see what is bad in our culture and what is good in our culture."[27] Thus there is both continuity and discontinuity, and critically it is Aboriginal people themselves who are primarily responsible for discerning the difference. Missionary Paul Albrecht relates several anecdotes which further elucidate this and show in practice how such an approach can work.

Albrecht's own father was an early missionary and so Paul has the advantage of a long view, having grown up on the mission and then later serving there himself. He recounts how his father had forbidden various rituals, one of which was to do with the fertility of the earth— "increase" rituals—and another which related to the initiation of boys—"man-making" rituals. Paul Albrecht noticed that in his time on the mission one of these rituals indeed seemed to no longer be practiced, namely the one to do with the earth, whereas the other "man-making" ritual was continued. Albrecht questioned some of his Aboriginal friends about this and they responded that having learned about God's provision and ongoing creative work they no longer saw the need for the former rituals which were thought to accomplish the same thing. However, they saw no such conflict with the initiation rituals for young men, even though both had been forbidden by the former missionary. Albrecht says, "For them, the initiation of boys had a social significance quite apart from the religious aspects associated with the ceremony, and they were not prepared to give this up—and they didn't."[28] Noteworthy is how this happened quite naturally among the Aboriginal Christians without the knowledge of the white missionaries of the time.

Later on, Albrecht actually found out that some of the places where "increase" rituals were traditionally practiced were being used. However, again to his surprise, he was informed that although the location still had significance for communal life in various ways, the meetings at those places no longer carried the religious and spiritual associations they once did. Albrecht concludes,

> It seems to me that what happened in the religious area was this. The Christian faith was accepted because it was seen to address itself relevantly to a great felt need. However, the Aboriginal Christians discriminated between what they saw as the central tenets of the Christian faith, and the western application of that faith to their specific cultural situation. The latter they did not accept.[29]

This approach acknowledges that the missionaries made mistakes and were not always

able to discern themselves what was of the essence of the faith and what were their own western European cultural trappings. It seeks to respect traditional Aboriginal culture. It is also concerned with maintaining the integrity of the Christian faith as, in some sense, transcultural, and so resists the step of developing a distinctly "Aboriginal Christianity."

Thus there is both continuity and discontinuity, and critically it is Aboriginal people themselves who are primarily responsible for discerning the difference.

Lessons for Today

After our analysis of the Newtown mural and theological reflection on some of the issues raised, we draw the two into mutual conversation to consider what lessons the church may draw for today. As the church seeks to do its theology and speak to challenging issues such as those raised in the discussion above, in what ways is the mural suggestive of a particular approach? Correspondingly, how does the church's theological reflection speak into the implicit questions and tensions raised by the mural?

First, the mural is a significant example of religion being openly addressed in Australian public life, and this is no small thing given contemporary Australian culture. In the recent census conducted once every five years in Australia, the number of those self-identifying as Christian fell below fifty percent for the first time in history. Like many places in the western world, the change has not been primarily through other religions making gains, but in a significant increase in those claiming no religious affiliation at all. In this climate it is not surprising that the nature of religious discussion and depiction in Australian public life has similarly declined at a steady rate. Cultural examples of explicitly religious and spiritual expressions have become harder to find in modern Australia. However, here in the Newtown mural is one which sits prominently in the bustling suburbs of Australia's biggest city, and which has now been heritage listed. This example of a cultural representation of religion should be encouraging for the church as it shows clearly that there is still a place for public discussion of things of a spiritual nature. Christians can and should engage with confidence.

Second, when it comes to those discussions, the mural also demonstrates a sophistication and complexity which should also encourage Christians to engage thoughtfully in the public conversation. The way in which the mural appropriates, contextualizes, resists, and subverts simultaneously really is quite remarkable, and suggests a public conversation on religion and spirituality which has the potential to be thoughtful and nuanced. If Christians feel that in an increasingly secular

culture any religious discussion in the public space will necessarily be shallow and unreflective, this mural suggests differently. In recent years the Lutheran Church of Australia has employed an Office for Public Theology which carries out research and writing on behalf of the bishop of the church in order to respond to issues from a Christian perspective. The Newtown mural suggests this sort of initiative is worthwhile and to be encouraged. Christians can and should engage thoughtfully.

Third, the ambiguity and tension which is manifest in the mural's expression of religion and spirituality should also give the church pause while considering how to publicly confess the faith in twenty-first-century Australia. We can see, for example, the importance for Australians in contextualizing the Christian message to local issues, rather than assuming personalities and styles imported from the United States and elsewhere will translate into Australian culture without issue. We can also see the tension between Christianity and Aboriginal religion and spirituality in Australia, and an implicit acknowledgement of the sometimes-difficult history on that score. While the Christian confession of faith is always the same, the context Australians find themselves in suggests that sensitivity to the history involved and ongoing tensions will be required to have any real impact. Christians can and should engage sensitively.

While these last points have considered what Christians can learn by analyzing the Newtown mural, the church can also offer responses to the questions raised by the mural in its theology and public witness. The mural leaves unresolved the tension between the Christian heritage and Aboriginal spirituality and religion. However, the church has proposed various ways in which at least those Aboriginal Christians may not have to choose between one or the other. Despite the many sins of early white settlers in Australia against the Indigenous population, including at times by Christian missionaries, the best of the church's witness has not disregarded and rejected all aspects of Aboriginal culture, but instead has encouraged Aboriginal Christians themselves to discern what can be maintained with integrity.

If Christians feel that in an increasingly secular culture any religious discussion in the public space will necessarily be shallow and unreflective, this mural suggests differently.

Conclusion

My daughter was raising a quite complex and profound question when she asked about the relationship between the Dreaming stories of Australia's Indigenous people and the biblical stories of creation. As she asked, I felt the same tension within myself

as is exhibited in the Newtown mural, Australian society generally, and the church's work together with Aboriginal Christians. I offered her a response which considered the understandable sensitivities in Australia in regard to Indigenous spirituality, but which also confessed my own Christian faith thoughtfully and with integrity. I spoke to her of the God we confess as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who created all things and loves all people regardless of their skin color—and has left no one without a witness to himself (Acts 14:17). Perhaps one day she will ask about Martin Luther King Jr., and I can narrate the incredible way in which his inspiration and legacy was both appropriated and resisted in relation to these issues in Australian society.

Endnotes

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Transcript of the speech: Martin Luther King and James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr,* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 217–24.

2 Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

3 Keith D. Miller, "Voice Merging and Self-Making: The Epistemology of 'I Have a Dream,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1989): 23.

4 Benjamin K. Forrest et al., eds., *A Legacy of Preaching: The Life, Theology, and Method of History's Great Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 461.

5 Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 4.

6 Cf. the characterization of King's work in Forrest et al., *A Legacy of Preaching*, 461, as "Preaching a Prophetic Dream of Social Justice as Kingdom Work."

7 *I Have a Dream—The Making of a Mural*, produced by Liz Paddison; directed and edited by Darrin Baker (2012, Dynamic Screen Content, Australia) https://youtu.be/HjLEnun0TUY. I have used this source for much of the background information.

8 I have found no explicit evidence to suggest this street name was a particular influence in the choice of Martin Luther King Jr. for the mural.

9 Drew W. Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech That Inspired a Nation*, 1st ed (New York: Ecco, 2003), 229.

10 *I Have a Dream*, Paddison, 14:23–14:42, https://youtu.be/HjLEnun0TUY.

11 Josh Dye, "'I Have a Dream' Newtown mural to be heritage listed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 4, 2014, https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/i-have-a-dream-newtown-mural-to-be-heritage-listed-20141204-11zv7f.html.

12 *I have a dream*, Paddison, 14:23–14:42, https://youtu.be/HjLEnun0TUY.

13 This section could arguably be described as a separate piece of art in its own right rather than part of "the mural." However, its' content is clearly designed to connect with the original and to the average viewer the whole scene has the appearance of needing to be taken together.

14 *Martin Luther King "I have a dream" mural in Newtown*, Matt Hayden Blogger, 0:30–0:50, https://youtu.be/Pl6beutyq8E.

15 For this summary of the concept of the "dreaming" I have relied on Strehlow's description as quoted in: Paul Albrecht, "Learning from past missionary work in central Australia for ministry to Aboriginal people

today," *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 47 no 2 (Aug 2013): p 122-129, and "The Dreaming," Encyclopedia Britannica, Publisher: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Date Published: 24 November 2020, /www.britannica.com/topic/the-Dreaming-Australian-Aboriginal-mythology. Access date Dec 12, 2022.

16 Anne Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1991), 1.

17 *I have a dream*, Paddison, 5:45–8:30, https://youtu.be/HjLEnun0TUY.

18 Norm Habel, "Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 83, no. 2 (Aug 1989), 83.

19 Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes*, 12.

20 Paul Albrecht, "The Finke River Mission Approach to Mission Work among Aborigines in Central Australia," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (May 1998): 8.

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22 Wayne A Holst, "Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology," *Missiology* 26, no. 3 (July 1998): 375.

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25 Pattel-Gray, Brown, and World Council of Churches, *Indigenous Australia*, 16.

26 John Pfitzner, Review of "Rainbow spirit theology: towards an Australian Aboriginal theology," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (May 1998): 40.

27 Norm Habel, "Aboriginal Australians," 83.

28 Paul Albrecht, "Hermannsburg, a meeting-place of cultures: personal reflections," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 15, no. 3 (Dec 1981): 110.

29 Albrecht, "Hermannsburg," 111.

Preventing the Poisonous Pitfalls of Politicization and Polarization

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"Socialism breaks the seventh commandment because it is based on stealing."
"Capitalism breaks the ninth commandment because its foundation is greed."
"You cannot be a Christian and vote for Trump."
"You cannot be a Christian and vote for anyone but Trump."
"You cannot be a Christian and be a Democrat."
"You cannot be a Christian and be a Republican."

Our colleges—especially the secular public ones—are hubs of social justice and political activity. Students are perhaps more engaged than at any time since the 1960s. Taking action, pursuing engagement, and seeking justice are good, especially compared to indifference or apathy or even hostility. So then, how can students, and actually all of us, be equipped and led in ways that foster faith-driven engagement while avoiding the pitfalls of politicizing the gospel—and thus actually nullifying it? How do we counteract and even prevent the poisonous polarization that divides not only campus and country, but even members of the body of Christ?

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Foundational Doctrines – Two Kingdoms, Two Kinds of Righteousness

Valuable, foundational keys to answering these questions are the teachings on the two kingdoms and the two kinds of righteousness. I am not going to rehash all the particulars of these two cardinal Lutheran doctrines, as I assume most readers of *Concordia Journal* are quite familiar with both. If you want further study beyond what I provide here, you can consult the volume *One Lord, Two Hands?* edited by Matthew Harrison and John Pless that just came out in 2021,[1] as well as the ongoing work by Robert Kolb, Charles Arand, Joel Biermann, and others on the two kinds of righteousness.[2] That being said, we do need to lay the groundwork with a brief overview, and then draw some insights and applications specific to the task at hand.

Martin Luther once observed that one way of understanding the doctrine on the two realms is that the spiritual kingdom is one of hearing [*hör reich*] while the kingdom of the world is one of seeing [*sehe reich*].[3]

Thus, authorities in the kingdom of God's left hand in the world evaluate on the basis of evidence that is observable—as they should. So, for example, distributive justice and reward, as well as punishment, is the government's order of the day; this is both fair to what the individual's activity deserves and in the best interest of an ordered civil society—as it should be. But in the kingdom of his right hand through the church, God's verdict is the oral and aural absolution: the proclamation of an unconditional, unearned forgiveness of sins unachievable by any real or perceived merit or worth; the salvation, the kind of righteousness received passively as pure gift. Though clearly distinguished, the two kingdoms "are not in . . . competition"—they are both God's, after all—"but together work to accomplish God's purpose of claiming, preserving, saving and finally restoring the whole creation."[4] However, when the two kingdoms are mixed or muddled or merged, their corollaries of law and gospel are confused and therefore both justice for all and salvation for sinners would be in peril; both state and church could crumble and collapse.[5]

Luther fumed that Satan is unceasingly "cooking and brewing" the two kingdoms into one.[6] As John Pless has noted, the devil "would like nothing better than duping folks into believing that salvation comes through secular government [or movements] or, conversely, that the church is the institution [that establishes and maintains] civil righteousness in the world."

But the teaching on the two kingdoms would prevent us from perverting the gospel into political ideology. Such conflation is poison.

Good and Bad Ways to Relate Your Faith to Politics

Robert Benne, in his book *Good and Bad Ways to Think About Religion and Politics*,[8] calls this fusion. Benne, founder and former director of the Center for Religion and Society,[9] distinguishes between three groups: the fusionists, the separationists—the approaches of both of which he decries—and the critical engagers—whom he lauds.

I will be adapting this framework and applying it to our ministerial and synodical contexts.

Fusion

Fusion occurs when core religious beliefs are so wedded to a particular political ideology or party or a set of public policies that they become nearly identical. At its extreme we can think of some types of Christian nationalism,[10] but it can be a temptation for any generally conservative or traditional Christian group or individual. Back to fusion shortly.

Separationism

Separationism, on the other hand, is espoused by those who believe that religiously based moral or ethical values—or even those values that are simply held by religious folk for whatever reason—ought to have no place in public policymaking or even discourse. This is a fault among many secularists and atheists but can also be seductive for liberal or progressive Christians. At its most militant, there are those who want religion legally banished from public life altogether; some of the so-called New Atheists[11] seem to suggest this. Others simply want you and me to drop those values any time we enter the public square. This, of course, is not only unwise and even unethical—going against conscience, as well as being hypocritical—but is also impossible, as it is self-negating. For if I eliminate those values when I enter the political realm, it is not I who enter but a superficial husk of self. So, separationism "truncates religion and impoverishes politics."[12] Furthermore, this demand by the separationists is also directly contradictory, as the universal values they exclusively want to have acknowledged and employed—which supposedly contradict religious ones—include the value of freedom over and against coercion. Our founding fathers understood this and enshrined religious freedom in constitutional law through our first amendment. Nonetheless, the separationists, unsurprisingly, will cite the tradition of separation of church and state in their defense. Two brief points will have to suffice here.

(1) The separation of church and state which Thomas Jefferson referenced in a personal letter to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut is not a zero-sum game.[13] While majoring in political science in college, I learned of at least seven different levels of relationship between religion and state in political theory and national practice, with countries like France at one end and Saudi Arabia on the other, and the United States somewhere in the middle.

(2) Separation of institutional church from the sanctioning state is simply a different matter than the interaction of religious persons and organizations with politics.[14]

But, honestly, separationism is not as much of a threat among us within the

LCMS as fusionism. I do not think I have ever met an avowed, committed, consistent separationist in the Missouri Synod. So, if I stop here, I have probably only given you ammunition for further anger against *those* guys, the others. As C. S. Lewis put it, "The devil always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is worse. You see why, of course. He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one."[15] That is why I began this paper with examples of fusionism, surely the greater temptation and more prevalent error among us.

Fusion redux and examples

The fusionists believe that there is so much affinity between the central claims of the faith they hold and their favored political policies, programs, and even parties that the two are scarcely distinguishable. Fusionism "collapses the critical distance that Christian faith must maintain from all worldly sources and expressions of wisdom and power." Benne continues: "It is not as if there were no connection between [the] central claims of the faith and political philosophies and politics. There certainly are, or we would have to admit that the separationists are right. But the problem is that the connections between the central claims and [the] political policies . . . even particular political candidates . . . are too certain and confident—too straight a line is drawn." He summarizes: "Fusion destroys the needed prophetic and universal elements of the faith while it gives too much sacred legitimation to the needs [and desires] of the nation, tribe, or ethnic group," to *us*, especially over and against *them*. "Fusion is damaging to the transcendent claims of faith, making them instead suspiciously consonant with partisan political perspectives of a very earthly . . . secular," and temporal sort. It risks "immanentizing the eschaton" infusing the events of our brief lifespans, cultural moments and wars, even every election, with permanent and eternal significance, as we anxiously seek to usher in the Kingdom by our political machinations. "Politicizing the church's message" in ways that makes particular politics essential, central, and foundational to the kerygma "destroys the transcendent character of the Gospel by merging it with mundane and partisan human action. Such fusion destroys the universality and radicality of the Gospel by turning it into a partisan political instrument."[16] It turns the gospel into the law of political prescription; and it turns the law, especially what we call its political use of curb, into the gospel. And so, the fusionists, intentionally or not, ultimately end up making political use (abuse!) of religion, even bastardization. And politicized religion reduces to a significant extent religious claims to this-worldly dynamics. Instead of redemption for all, politicized religion offers it only to those on the correct side of political fault lines. Instead of divine favor freely offered by God in Christ, politicized religion offers it to those who work for particular political causes. Instead of Christian liberty, politicized religion often entails coercion or at least pressure to accept its claims.[17]

The problem is not that this is usually that to which we explicitly and directly aspire; obviously, none of this is written into the constitution of the congregation you attend or serve. No, the problem is that so much of this, however, is implicit in our assumptions and attitudes, in our humor and hubris, and thus in our words and works, our activities and actions—a kind of soft fusionism, if you will, but perhaps all the more dangerous and harmful, because it works in a hidden and thus subversive manner.

There are political non-negotiables for Christians, issues in which there are seemingly rather straight lines from faith to policy. For example, marriage, religious freedom, and life. Even so, it need not be faith *alone* which informs our positions or Scripture which should *solely* shape our discourse in the public square; the physical and social sciences, political theory, natural law, general human flourishing, constitutional rights, and more all also support our positions here.

But let me now give some examples from our ranks that I think fall under fusionism. These are all perhaps rather provocative.

Until 1982, when praying the Litany, almost all our congregations petitioned the Lord that he would "give to our nation perpetual victory over all its enemies."[18] This is the language found in *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)* of 1941. *Lutheran Worship* (1982) and *Lutheran Service Book* (2006) followed the lead of the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) and do not pray this way, but rather ask that the Lord would "give our country protection in every time of *need*."[19] The difference is significant. If you prayed the Litany before the Reformation, this petition was absent.[20] Martin Luther added it in both his Latin and German versions of this responsory prayer, specifically that the Lord would "give to our emperor [Kaiser] perpetual victory over all his enemies."[21] The historical context in 1529 is likely determinative here, as Luther Reed points out that "Luther's Litany had been called forth by the threat of war with the [Ottoman] Turks . . . who had reached the gates of Vienna . . . His immediate purpose [for his revision of these prayers] may have been to arouse the church to prayer against the Turk."[22] Reed further argues that this petition "was not to be limited to foreign foes. It certainly included the thought that our enemies may be within as well as without and that the nation's worst foes may conceivably be some of its own citizens or officials or the sins of the people as a whole."[23] This very charitable and laudable interpretation notwithstanding, it is hard to see how a plain reading or praying of this text today would not lend itself to at least a semi or latent Christian nationalism and a dangerous fusion which either makes it seem that all our enemies are to be identified with the *Lord*'s enemies, a thought that would all-too-easily conflate the church with the nation,[24] or which ignores the reality that our country, let alone our leader at any given time, may not be perpetually in the right against all enemies.[25] A telling example comes from Luther's own Germany. Some four hundred years after Luther's Litany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer commented on such fusionist dangers when he wrote in 1939: "Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative

of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose."[26] More succinctly, the very same year *TLH* was published and retained the petition for perpetual national victory, Bonhoeffer was asked by the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, "What do you pray for in these days?" Bonhoeffer replied, "If you want to know the truth, I pray for the *defeat* of my country."[27]

The reader may counter that this is simply a historically conditioned example from the past which has actually been discarded. However, I maintain that the way of thinking that undergirds it is still very much present among us today.

My second example of fusion is one to which I already alluded. A few years ago, someone, I believe it was one of my students at our weekly Sunday luncheon, said, "Socialism breaks the seventh commandment because it is based on stealing." My response, tongue in cheek, was: "Well, capitalism breaks the ninth commandment because its foundation is greed."[28]

Indeed, Josef Imberg (1916–1998), late conservative Lutheran Swedish missionary and theological lecturer in Kenya, identifies the most typical form of socialism with a type of capitalism anyway. (It should be obvious that not all forms of economic socialism automatically equal godless dictatorial communism.) It is simplest if I quote several paragraphs on what Imberg calls "two kinds of capitalism" from his book on Christian ethics, *God in the world:*[29]

> According to one theory it is believed that *individuals* are the ones best fitted to look after their own interests and in that way also give the best contribution to the life of the community. Where these thoughts are stressed strongly and consistently, the system is called *private capitalism*. On the positive side of this thinking it may be said that it accepts and tries to make use of the ability, the interest, and the go-ahead spirit of individuals, families, companies, etc. On the negative side it may be said that selfishness and greed of gain will very often be present and cause loss and harm to many, either they are involved in the business or not.
>
> To present an alternative to private capitalism some thinkers have tried to describe a different way. Their system, they say, does not aim at any gain to individuals or companies. *Everything*, the land, farms, companies, factories, etc., *should be owned and run by the state, because the state is supposed to know better than any individual what is best for all, for the common interest of the people and the country.* According to the degree of application…this kind of thinking may be given different names, socialism, communism,

> [even] state capitalism . . . since money, capital, interest, profit, and wages cannot be excluded in this case either . . .[30] It may be practised [sic] on a total scale, where no individual owns anything (although in one of those countries a certain leader owned twelve very fast luxury cars), or in a minor scale, or in a more mixed form.[31]
>
> Because of her task and her message the Church cannot associate herself with any of these two schools of thought. No doubt both have pointed to mistakes in the past and to difficulties in the present world which they wish to remove, but both also make mistakes and introduce new difficulties. Therefore the church must stress some points against both. Against private capitalism it must be said that there is a very great danger that the interest of personal gain overlooks the interest and need of many individuals and the community as a whole.

Elsewhere Imberg goes into greater detail and gives specific examples, such as the exploitation of human labor, as well as the manufacturing of superfluous—even dangerous—goods, for which a market must be fabricated through the wastefulness of advertising.[32]

> Against state capitalism, and communism of all kinds, it must be said that the tendency to restrain personal freedom and integrity is obvious in the system. And further, the land is not looked after in a better way under that system. The hungry are not fed in a better way, the pollution of the air and the spoiling of the natural resources are not held back more effectively there than in other countries, sometimes it is much worse. Furthermore the state machinery becomes an end in itself, preventing many things it was supposed to promote.

Imberg summarizes: "Therefore, the spiritual message to all political, social and financial schools of thought must be: look well after the personal freedom of the individuals; stress the duty of everybody to work for the interest and the common good of the community; encourage this general principle that we are all members of one body, and when living in it we have to serve each other in the best way we can."

As Joel Biermann puts it: "Intricate policy issues seeking to address economic inequality have complex and variegated answers, and [more than one] of them may be legitimate options in the pursuit of God's justice."[33] So, Christians of good will and integrity should be able to come to different conclusions on economic policy and systems without the threat of God's wrath against disobedience.

Similarly, while there surely is and needs to be agreement on the core of many issues, practical and detailed policy conclusions may differ without the sincerity of faith being questioned or even dismissed. Thus, my third example is from issues of race and racism. I would certainly hope that we all agree about the intrinsic evil of racism, but we may disagree on which policies best combat it and help its victims: police reform, busing, affirmative action, taxation, business incentives, school vouchers, education reform, and so on. These disagreements can be discussed and debated without resorting to name-calling and countercharges of racism and bigotry, which create more heat than light from and for those who are to be light and salt for the world.

The final example I will give of fusion among us is perhaps the most controversial of the four. This was, if I remember correctly, a statement from one of our clergy at a pastors' gathering: "You cannot be a Christian and be pro-choice." At first glance, this might seem pretty obvious; after all, I just mentioned life issues as one of our non-negotiables; maybe you have said something like this yourself. But even non-negotiables can be approached differently by different people without denying the Christian identity or saving faith of the other. It is the public and political policy and position which is non-negotiable: that life at conception is human and also innocent under the law, and must thus be protected by the state, *that* is clear; but the *consistency* of the confession and practice of fellow saint-sinners is not nearly so firm and fixed, not even yours.[34] Our theology is clear: what makes a Christian is baptism, teaching. If someone, anyone is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and she or he publicly confesses the creedal faith, then charity, humility, and reality demand that we acknowledge that person as a fellow brother or sister in Christ. Furthermore, our doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* means that they, like you, are not only saints in Christ, but also broken, damaged sinners who, yes, sin, in deed, word, and thought, even in policy and political positions. It is the acknowledgement of that common ground and core in Christ which might also be the starting point for transformed hearts and minds on the abortion issue. Charity also means that we put the best construction on the context and reasons for the other's positions. Often in the abortion question there is ignorance and confusion, and unintended and unrecognized inconsistency, rather than formal, intentional, and direct cooperation in willing evil; and frequently this is result of a cultural, political, and academic "indoctrination" that can be extremely difficult to avoid, resist, and overcome. Finally, charity means that we assume the best about the other's purposes: that they, too, are seeking human flourishing under God's left-hand reign; that their *goal* is not to kill babies nor to intentionally promote murder, but rather, a more just and equitable society. Let me reiterate and emphasize that abortion is a destructive and grievous sin. But in our conviction to combat the evil of taking sacred life, may we be considered and

constructive, edifying while exhorting (Eph 4:29). Let us patiently seek to show how they in trying to reach the praiseworthy goal of a good and fair society might not only be failing in this regard but also breaking the fifth commandment, but not while we flippantly break the eighth.

Even non-negotiables can be approached differently by different people without denying the Christian identity or saving faith of the other.

Critical Engagement

So, what is the solution? How do we avoid separationism on the one hand and, more relevantly, fusion on the other? Benne recommends a third way, a *via media*: critical engagement. "This approach assumes that the movement from core Christian beliefs . . . traverses a number of steps before it gets to specific policies." Those steps and factors might include your political philosophy, race, gender, assessment of the current situation, socio-economic status, religious intensity, ordering of values, nationality, age, upbringing, self-interest, the traditional political convictions of your tribes and communities, the political culture of your region or locality, your temperament, your peer group, the sources from which you draw to understand the political world, and more. "So, moving from core Christian convictions though this morass of impinging factors is a complex and jagged matter," usually not a matter of straight-line thinking, speaking and acting. Thus, organized religion's factor in politics ought generally to be indirect yet important: that is, for the most part the church as an organization, as a whole, should act indirectly in the political sphere.[35] If the church really is the church, it will produce well-formed members: pastors and perhaps especially laypeople, as well as lay-led voluntary associations who themselves will make the journey from core to policy in their lives and vocations as individuals, voters, community organizers, speakers, listeners, and politicians, and as participants in voluntary associations, maybe even as protestors.[36]

For Lutherans—really, for everyone—this formation must include a robust understanding and practical application of some of the teachings I have already mentioned or to which I have alluded: the two kingdoms, vocation, the saint-sinner paradox, the two kinds of righteousness. You might say that "critical engagement" is a subset of Luther's active or civic righteousness. Immerse yourself in all these doctrines.

Critical Engagement: Sanctification and the Eighth Commandment

Perhaps more important than ever, the formation also includes the application of the doctrine of sanctification, especially in light of the eighth commandment, both within the church and perhaps especially with outsiders in broader society. So, instead

of succumbing to anger, practice patience, compassion, and empathy;[37] view your neighbors through the lens of God's love and mercy. Pray for your neighbor, and for yourself. Do not prejudicially and simplistically generalize and, of course, do not insult. A brief example and aside, and this is my opinion here: as a term, "woke" or "wokeism" means many different things to many different people, and its use by political and/or religious conservatives too often can be associated with lazy, hazy fear-mongering and sarcastic insult; better to avoid it and, rather, identify what are the specific problems in a movement or ideology and then offer real solutions.

Key here is self-awareness, as well as honest dialogue partners and friends who will call you on your nonsense.

Key here is self-awareness, as well as honest dialogue partners and friends who will call you on your nonsense—especially your biases, assumptions, and blind spots. And so, humility is essential, as well. Given the complexity in moving from the Christian core in doctrine and faith to political position and action, "Christians should have enough humility about their political choices to engage others constructively. Further, it adds to our humility when we remember our unearned blessing to be in a country where political [opinions and] options are not a life-or-death matter, as they are in totalitarian [or gangster state]. We can *afford* to be on different sides . . . [And] we should be able to come to different political judgments without fracturing . . . friendship or conversation. Too often in our polarized world political disagreement leads to the withdrawal from contact or conversation with political opponents."[38]

Critical Engagement: Conversation with Those Who Have Opposing Views

And I would argue that we should actively seek out relationships and conversations with those who differ from us politically and religiously. Korey Maas had a fine article on how then to engage in *The Lutheran Witness* in 2020 entitled "Political Community and Polite Communication."[39] In it he reminds us of what should be evident, but is so often forgotten: the goal of all serious conversation is not to defeat and certainly not to deceive or embarrass or bully the challenger, but rather the goal is agreement in truth. And as in prayer, so this in fact begins with first listening; with active, attentive, open, hopeful listening you might even learn something from your conversation partner. And with learning comes greater understanding of the other person, of their position, even of yourself and of your own point of view. You cannot agree before you understand. Of course, you not only listen; you do also speak. Your speaking is done best if it starts with questions, especially open-ended ones, questions that show actual interest in what the other person is trying to express, even interest in

them: "What is the specific topic? Why do you think that?" And it "is crucial to speak well—both clearly and civilly—so that what one means is clearly understood, and so that understanding is not hindered by a distracting or off-putting tone." By the way, proper tone is almost impossible to convey via social media or online in general. "True understanding has been reached only when each party can state the other's position—and his or her reasons for holding that position—in such a way that each approves of the other's summary." A goal is that you should know your opponent's position at least as well as he or she does.

By the way, and I realize that this is a preschool or Sunday School reminder that you already know, but smiling and kindness are underrated; they help a lot. When I was in seminary, Professor Jeffrey Gibbs reminded us that many, maybe even most, in the culture think that conservative Christians are mean and stupid, so we have to try extra hard to be kind and smart.

Journalist and interviewer Celeste Headlee echoes some of Maas's points and adds some of her own in a recent TedTalk on "How to Have a Good Conversation."[40] Here are just a few:

- Do not multitask. Be totally present and focused. Silence the phone and turn it upside down.
- If you do not know, say "I don't know. Let me think about that. I'll try to get back to you."
- Do not equate your experience with theirs. *It is never the same.* Do not steal that moment. Conversations are not a personal promotional opportunity.
- Again, listen. We should listen with the intent to understand, but too often we listen with the intent to reply.

Please do not misunderstand me. None of this means compromising your principles or giving up your position in exasperation. No, "listening to [someone's] opposing view does not [necessarily] imply your agreement. It may, however, convey a level of care that only active listening can impart. Biting your tongue to keep from interrupting a friend who's passionately sharing his point of view does not strip you of your own zeal but may allow the friendship to continue for another day. Failing to convince a colleague [or a classmate] of your convictions during an hour-long debate doesn't mean you have somehow personally failed. Instead, you may have won a seat at the next conversation"[41] and, again, that time investment can help you learn something and even deepen the relationship. That is success.

If you cannot find those flesh-and-blood conversation partners, I would venture to say that you are not trying hard enough, but at least then regularly read op-ed pieces from those with different perspectives and politics than yours, and even online conversations are probably better than nothing.

For role models and mentors here, you can hardly do better than the well-known public intellectuals Cornel West of Union Theological Seminary and Robert George of Princeton. Progressive West and conservative George are dear friends and devout Christian brothers, the former Baptist and the latter Roman Catholic, who taught courses together at Princeton and travel the country to demonstrate their commitment to free speech. As the "ideological odd couple," they discuss the importance of civil discourse in this era of polarization. They explore their opposing views, with West on the socialist left and George on the "theoconservative" right, on several policy areas, respectfully disagreeing as well as finding common ground.[42]

Allow me to share a couple of points from an interview with the two of them at the 2021 National Summit on Education Reform in Florida. When asked "How do you go about engaging, on a political basis, with people with whom you disagree?," West responded, "The first thing you want to do is *stay in contact with their humanity*. . . . At that deep human level, this is a spiritual issue, it's not just political. . . . Get to know folk . . . ask them how their mama is doing. . . . This allows them to open themselves to be candid . . . enough" so that the move can be made from paranoia[43] to trust, from enmity to even friendship. West also emphasizes humility, which he calls "the benchmark of spiritual maturity in any moral sophistication. When you don't have humility and you don't have fallibility, all you're going to have is superficial political statements and counterstatements that become more [and more] polarizing, moving toward gangsterizing. And you can't approach this without the spiritual and the moral. . . . This is what I learned in Vacation Bible School at Shiloh [Baptist Church in Sacramento]: I'm inadequate, I fall short . . . humility."

George makes a different but equally important point regarding what Amy Chua of Yale has famously labeled "tribalism" in her 2018 book on political group instinct and groupthink.[44] George says, "I am going to be suspicious of anybody who doesn't sometimes break with his or her tribe. Because it's just not plausible to think that there is always going to be one side that's going to be right about everything. . . . That person is going to look to me like a hack . . . a person who's not thinking for himself. . . . [And, if so,] you've just become a tribalist . . . an ideologue, and you're on your way to being . . . a demagogue."[45]

Conclusion: The Church – Proclaiming, Praying, Serving, Suffering

In very Lutheran fashion, I want to close with what may seem like a contradictory point but is actually a paradox which lies at the heart of all this if we are truly to be and remain the church in these politically polarized times, which threaten even God's people. Benne makes the point, and so does Bo Giertz. First, back to Benne: "We are perhaps getting the politics we deserve," he says. "Orthodox Christianity is now counter-cultural; it is being whittled down to a disciplined community of faith that

can again be salt and leaven. What an opportunity for the church [as an institution] to renew a society at its roots, not by political agitation but by the proclamation of the whole Gospel. Then moral regeneration and political health will follow. [And/]or perhaps persecution."[46]

Giertz expands on and deepens this line of thought. In 1939, in the shadow of the godless communism of Joseph Stalin to the east and the brutal Nazism of Adolf Hitler to the south, Pastor Giertz wrote the following from the rural parish he was serving in southern Sweden:

> [We need] a living faith in the world to come, that which lies beyond and which the Church in all times has painted in bold images. All too often it has been said that this world-to-come can be permitted to fade away and lose its actuality, if only we with all our heart took the opportunity to serve God in that setting in which we find ourselves *today*. The church should be more realistic, [it is argued]. However, the more she engaged herself in the struggles of the day, the more she was seized by the impatience of the fervent advocates fighting for societal causes and the more she devoted herself to their sharp judgments and their clear opposition against certain of their fellow men. She lost the crown of glory upon which it is written: *Patiens quia æterna*. ["She is patient, for she is of eternity."] She shared in that sin which so often blemishes our human zeal for world improvement: she forgot love to a refractory humanity. She began to protest, scold, and condemn, where she was called to suffer, pray, and serve.
>
> In the Christian critique of culture, there has at times been a tendency to create "increased opportunities for the gospel to thrive" by establishing laws to check the anti-Christian powers. The author of these lines has himself believed in that way but does so no longer. In the situation in which we now find ourselves we do not primarily need victories in debates and discussions, not mass petitions and movements based on political positions – all of which can [indeed] induce the state authorities to well-meaning interventions against various anti-Christian trends today. Much *more* than these, though, we need a rebirth of our own devotional life; a living movement of prayer and intercession; a worship life borne by a living congregation, imprinted by God's presence, and saturated by a heavenly Jubilate, all while revealing the mystery of the atonement which alone can elicit a glad and unselfish service unto others which is something more than the old man's works of the law in societal dress.

Here the church needs to be filled once again with the great visions of the world beyond. She needs to learn patience in the certainty that all the opposition of the world and its challenges weigh as light as a feather compared to that which has already been achieved and secured in the victory of the drama of salvation on Golgotha. She needs to learn willingness to suffer and receive strength to forgive without limits, because her gaze steadily rests upon the heavenly city on a hill. Perhaps it is beneficial for us that we get to live in a time when every Christian must become acquainted with the idea of martyrdom. Therein we are put to the test if we consider it worth it to be a Christian, even if the gospel in this world offers nothing but suffering and even if all of our societal dreams and our most hopeful reforms collapse in an apocalyptic catastrophe. Under such strain no Christianity passes muster other than the one which lives in the light from another world, and in the resurrection of Christ has found a whole new foundation for its way of thinking, its efforts and [all its] aspirations.[47]

Endnotes

1 Matthew Harrison and John Pless, eds., *One Lord, Two Hands? Essays on the Theology of the Two Kingdoms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021).

2 Among copious examples, see Robert Kolb, ed., *The Alien and the Proper: Luther's Two-Fold Righteousness in Controversy, Ministry, and Citizenship* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2023), as well as resources at https://scholar.csl.edu/faqtwokindsrighteousness/. An excerpt from the former is available at https://www.1517.org/articles/our-theology-luthers-two-kinds-of-righteousness-a-personal-reflection.

3 See William J. Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 121; Wright cites Luther's exposition of Psalm 8 from 1545 in WA 51:11, 25–30.

4 Joel Biermann, "Beyond the Booth," *Lutheran Witness*, August 2020, 10.

5 This paragraph is chiefly based on John Pless, "What Does This Mean? Two Kingdoms - One Lord," *For the Life of the World*, February 2012, 13. Here I refer to the government and the state as chief sub-categories within the left-hand realm; God also works through other temporal means and contexts such as family, employment, academia, and others, often in overlapping ways.

6 *Commentary on Psalm 101* (1534), AE 13:194.

7 Pless, "Two Kingdoms-One Lord," 13.

8 Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think About Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010). I first became aware of this book when it was recommended in Pless, "Two Kingdoms-One Lord," 13. For much of what follows on fusionism, separationism, and critical engagement, I am indebted to Benne's book, as well as his article "Religion and politics: How should they mesh?," *Philadelphia Inquirer* online, posted 12 June 2011. See also Benne "One King, Two Kingdoms: Where Religion and Politics Connect," *Lutheran Witness*, August 2020, 6; and Benne, *Reasonable Ethics: A Christian Approach to Social, Economic, and Political Concerns* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).

9 At Roanoke College, the center now bears his name.

10 There are different definitions and understandings of the term and concept "Christian nationalism," with it often being used in various ways by various people with various agendas. We can identify at least five versions: (1) Christian support for nationalism generally, which itself has various subsets and degrees, including simply a strong patriotism; (2) what we might call "Christian chosen-nation-ism," a confused identifying of a particular nation's divine purposes with that of ancient Israel; (3) the idea of Christian magistracy; (4) white Christian nationalism, a movement combing aspects of 1 through 3 with white identitarianism; (5) the Christian commonwealth, which would combine elements of 1 with a commitment to 3. (See Brad Littlejohn, "Christian Nationalism or Christian Commonwealth? A Call for Clarity," *Ad Fontes* online, 7 December 2022, accessed 10 June 2023). It is beyond the scope of this paper to compare and contrast these different concepts. As such, with "Christian nationalism," herein I am only referring to those types which have been labeled or described as "cultural nationalism" and/or "Christian chosen-nation-ism," or even a kind of "nativist folk religion," the proponents of which deem that political boundaries and cultural boundaries should overlap precisely, and thus also *merge religious faith and national identity* (see Paul D. Miller, interview with Morgan Lee, "Christian Nationalism Is Worse Than You Think," *Christianity Today* online, 13 January 2021. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/christian-nationalism-capitol-riots-trump-podcast.html, accessed 7 June 2023; and Miller, "What Is Christian Nationalism?," *Christianity Today* online, 3 February 2021. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html, accessed 7 June 2023).
For a conversation with differing perspectives from David Strand, Debra Erickson, and Miller, see "Christian Nationalism?," *Providence Magazine* online, 18 February 2021, at https://providencemag.com, accessed 12 June 2023; video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h55_uqe4U94.
For a Missouri Synod perspective, see Joel Biermann, "The Star-Spangled Reformer: Luther's Two Realms and Christian Nationalism," a paper presented at Concordia Seminary's Theological Symposium, "Church and Society: Living by Hope in a Secular Age," St. Louis, Missouri, 20 September 2023.

11 E.g., Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris.
12 Benne, *Good and Bad Ways*, 29.
13 See Daniel L. Dreisbach, "Origins and Dangers of the 'Wall of Separation' Between Church and State," *Imprimis*, October 2006, vol. 35 no. 10.
14 For more on this, see Benne, "Religion and Politics – One More Time," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* online, December 2001, vol. 1 no. 4 at https://learn.elca.org/jle/religion-and-politics-one-more-time/; accessed 5 May 2023.
15 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 186.
16 Benne, "Lutherans and the Political Challenges of 2016," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* online, October 2016, vol. 16 no. 9, paragraph 8 at https://learn.elca.org/jle/lutherans-and-the-political-challenges-of-2016/; accessed 2 May 2023.
17 This paragraph mostly adapted and quoted from Benne, *Good and Bad Ways*, 31, 32, 34, 37–38, 25. See also: "On the other hand, religionized politics elevates what should [indeed be penultimate] this-worldly claims to ultimate status. Politics gets raised beyond its reach and often stretches toward redemptive messianic proportions" (25).
18 *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 111 and #661. The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book*, the first English-language hymnal of the LCMS, also includes this petition (1912/1918, p. 119), as does the *Common Service Book* (ULCA, 1917), 150; Service *Book and Hymnal* (mostly predecessor bodies to the ELCA, 1958) does not, p. 159.
19 *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 282; *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 289; emphasis added.
20 Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947 rev. ed., 1960), 743.
21 AE 53:158, 164.
22 Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 629, 627, 628.
23 Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 633.
24 Thus, the fact that the Lutheran Nuremberg *Officium sacrum* of 1664 has the phrase "over all *thine* enemies" is no great improvement or help (see Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 633).
25 Some might argue that this fault has, after all, been corrected since 1982. However, I am convinced that such fusionist thinking is still alive and well among us: to wit, immediately after I presented this paper at the conference, two pastors defended this language of *TLH* and Luther.
26 Letter of June 1939 to Reinhold Niebuhr in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1939*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 15 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 210.
27 Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Victoria Barnett, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 744, emphasis added. For more on Bonhoeffer's thinking on a "theology of political life, in particular its relation to Martin Luther," see Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer on Resistance: The Word Against the Wheel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); quotation from Stephen Plant on back cover. Though generally excellent, in relating Bonhoeffer's thought to politics, DeJonge's book (122–126) does miss Bonhoeffer's connection of discipleship to baptism: see Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1963), 96–101 and, especially, 263, 266–269, and 286–292. In our Missouri Synod ranks, Theodore Hopkins has made this connection in *Christ, Church, and World: Bonhoeffer and Lutheran Ecclesiology after Christendom* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 80–81 and, especially, 116–117. For a summary article of the theses of DeJonge's book, see Michael DeJonge, "How does the church resist an unjust state? Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance," originally posted 31 January 2019, updated 17 March 2022, at https://www.abc.net.au/religion/dietrich-bonhoeffers-theology-of-resistance/10766546.
28 Cf. Wade Johnston, "Martin Luther on Poverty" in *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*, John T. Pless and Larry M. Vogel, eds. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2022), 265–269, especially 266–267.
29 Josef Imberg, *God in the world* (Berghem, Sweden: Evangelical Literature Mission-SCRIPTURA, 1999), 34–35, available at https://scriptura.nu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/God-in-the-world_Eng_webb.pdf.

30 This last phrase is from Josef Imberg, *Christian Life: A Handbook on Christian Ethics and Morals* (Gothenburg: Evangelical Literature Mission-SCRIPTURA, 2004), 193, available at https://scriptura.nu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Christian-life_Eng_webb.pdf, accessed 26 May 2023.

31 For Imberg, a "total scale" example would surely be the USSR, while both Sweden and the US are more "mixed" in scale. Chiefly because of the inaccuracy of the claim, my father Hans O. Andræ—as Imberg, a native of Sweden—always bristled when Sweden would be labeled a "socialist" country, without any nuance. He would then give the example of tennis courts being privately owned in Sweden, and thus a fee required to play on them, while in the US the courts were usually publicly owned and thus one could play at no cost: "See," he would say playfully, "Sweden is capitalist, and the US is socialist."

32 Imberg, *Christian Life: A Handbook on Christian Ethics and Morals*, 192–193.

33 Joel Biermann, "Beyond the Booth," 11.

34 Luther and Pieper spoke of "felicitous inconsistency;" see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 6, 87–91.

35 The non-negotiables mentioned above would provide exceptions to this.

36 This paragraph mostly adapted and quoted from Benne, "Religion and politics: How should they mesh?", and Benne, "Lutherans and the Political Challenges of 2016," paragraph 14. For a couple of resources in combating the charge of quietism—whether leveled at the church or individual members.

37 See Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Myth of "Righteous Anger: What the Bible Says About Human Anger," posted 19 October 2015 at www.ConcordiaTheology.org and also available as a booklet from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and Gibbs, "OK, So It's Not Righteous . . . But What Do I Do with My Anger? Reflections on Anger in the Christian Life" *Concordia Journal*, Fall 2018, 51.

38 Benne, "Lutherans and the Political Challenges of 2016," paragraph 14, emphasis added.

39 Korey Maas, "Political Community and Polite Communication," *The Lutheran Witness*, August 2020, 18. The quotes in this paragraph are from 20.

40 Celeste Headlee, "How to Have a Good Conversation," 1 May 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1vskiVDwl4, accessed 5 February 2023.

41 Amy Bird, "Family and Friends with Different Political Beliefs," *Lutheran Life*, Summer 2020, 11.

42 See summary and video at https://www.pbs.org/wnet/firing-line/video/cornel-west-and-robert-george-mpaztt/, accessed 28 May 2023. There is a myriad of videos out there of the two conversing; another fine example is from the 2021 National Summit on Education Reform, 18 November 2021, Lake Buena Vista, Florida, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu74uShIkBQ. See also their powerful March 2017 joint statement: "Truth-Seeking, Democracy, and Freedom of Thought and Expression," which especially and specifically engages our campus contexts; available at https://reason.com/volokh/2017/03/14/truth-seeking-democracy-and-fr/.

43 Though a related topic, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the prevalent phenomenon of conspiracy thinking and theorizing. On 27 March 2022 our LCMS U chapter hosted a lecture by Calum Matheson, Professor of Public Deliberation & Civic Life at the University of Pittsburgh and a faithful member of St. Mary Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh, entitled "The Truth Will Set You Free: Christian Discernment in an Age of Political Extremism and Conspiracy Thinking." Though it was not recorded, Matheson provided a similar presentation for the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, "Navigating Information Fatigue: Conspiracies!," 25 August 2020, which can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSP6H-GqNjA&list=PLURCv88vkz6_kSFM6RF87g-bhfzvGV1tq&index=7. A brief outline of this presentation is available at https://www.carnegielibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Conspiracy-Outline-and-Reading-List.pdf.

44 Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

45 Cornel West and Robert George at the 2021 National Summit on Education Reform, 18 November 2021, Lake Buena Vista, Florida, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu74uShIkBQ, accessed 5 February 2023, emphasis added. See especially 19:11–26:11, 47:47–48:22. See also:
William Weinrich emphasized the following point: When you are in discussion or dialogue with other

people - especially those coming from a different theological perspective - always do this first: Try to understand *why* people say what they do; or *why* they confess and practice what they do. Doctor Weinrich was making this point: In biblical and theological discussions, don't be 'trigger-happy.' Instead, it's better to go at it a little more slowly. Be a little more patient and sympathetic in your discussions. Try to understand what makes others in the dialogue express their faith - and practice their faith - in the manner that they do. Then, as Dr. Weinrich emphasizes, a meaningful and even fruitful dialogue becomes possible, even though you do not fully agree with them; such sympathetic dialogue enables you to become more aware of the underlying principles of another's belief, his way of thinking, and his confession (Wallace Schulz, "The 'William Weinrich' Principle" in *One of the Holy Trinity Suffered For Us: Essays in Honor of William Weinrich*, James Bushur, ed. [Luther Academy, 2021], 337).

46 Benne, "Lutherans and the Political Challenges of 2016," paragraph 22.

47 Bo Giertz, *Kyrkofromhet* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1939), 132–133, my translation from the seventh edition (1962), emphasis added.

Homiletical Helps

Lectionary Kick-start for the Second Sunday of Easter

Lectionary Kick-start is a weekly podcast brought to you from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Jessica Bordeleau hosts weekly conversations with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger, professors of homiletics. Their 25-minute discussions on the lectionary texts are your first step in planning for Sunday. The following is a discussion on the lectionary texts for the second week of Easter and possible sermon structures.

Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kick-start. We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or teaching lesson. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau, with Dr. David Schmidt and Dr. Peter Nafzger; they're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis. You can learn all about us in our introductory episode, but trust me, they're pretty good preachers! All right let's get started. Peter, where are we in the church year?

Peter: We are discussing what the lectionary calls the Second Sunday in Easter, the Sunday right after Easter.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would preach on this week. David, will you go first?

David: Sure. I am going to go with the gospel reading, John 20:19–31.

Peter: Well, there's a lot you can do with this reading.

David: There is so much! There is so much. It's such a beautiful reading. It's Easter. Jesus is coming among the disciples, and there's so much in there for preaching, and so you kind of have to limit yourself and focus on one thing so that you can really unpack how beautiful it is.

Jessica: I'm looking forward to this because in the last few years, this has become one of my favorite biblical narratives, so I'm excited to see what you're going to do!

David: I'm thinking that I might go with an image-based structure in the sermon. So, there's a painting by Caravaggio, it's called *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas.*

Peter: That one always gives me the willies.

David: Oh man, I know! Thomas is placing his finger in the side of Jesus. The flesh is so realistic looking and just the intimacy of that moment.

Peter: Intimacy is the right word. Every time I see that painting, I think it's almost too intimate!

David: Yeah. You've got Thomas and two apostles behind him, and they're all kind of staring down at Jesus's side. When you look at his side, there's this flap of skin. I mean, it is so realistic. This flap of skin, and Jesus's face is tender and gracious. It's not stern. Jesus is tenderly looking at Thomas, and he's actually using his hand to gently guide Thomas's hand into his side. So, you have this picture of Jesus who is graciously condescending to the desires of Thomas.

Jessica: I've got to see this picture. I'm looking it up online right now . . . Okay, I have the picture here.

David: Wow. Isn't that, isn't that amazing? Jessica, Your face right now is not saying it's gorgeous.

Jessica: You can see what's going on in that slash in Jesus's side. That's very . . . human looking, wow. And the look on Thomas's face.

David: I know! . . . All of a sudden, Jesus is opening that up to him and permitting him to do that. So, for me, the big picture for the sermon would be what

kind of a Jesus now lives and reigns? So, we're at the second Sunday of Easter, we're going to meet Jesus. We're going to actually see him. What kind of a Lord is he? And in this one small moment in the text, he's a very tender, very gracious Lord who kind of puts up with a lot and is willing to open himself up to the demands we're making in order that we might believe in him.

Peter: That we might know him. What I love about that partially is we talk in systems about the *direction of fit*, about that God doesn't require that we go up to his level, but he comes down to our level. Of course, you get that in the incarnation, but here this God comes down to Thomas's level, but he doesn't leave him there. He comes down and he meets him, and he shows him who he really is.

David: He reveals. You're met by this gracious God, wherever you're starting. It's like—*wherever you start, that's where I'm going to be*. I mean, you think of history: You've got Augustine's confessions. He's really interested in oratory, and he goes to listen to Ambrose, not because he cares about the Christian truths that Ambrose is saying, but because he's really interested in oratory and heard that Ambrose is a good speaker. So, God's like, okay, if that's what you need, if you need a good speaker, well here's Ambrose and I'll meet you there. Then God comes and Augustine is brought into the faith through the ministry of Ambrose . . . I mean, it's just this way in which God works. God meets us where we're at. We see on Easter the risen Lord, and the first thing we see about him or the thing that we see this day, is his willingness to meet us where we're at in order to bring us closer to him.

Peter: This is inviting the hearers to identify with Thomas and to kind of recognize where God meets us.

Jessica: That's so relevant to the current worldview. People have come from a patchwork theology: from different superstitions or religions or ideas. Some want to believe in the God of the Bible, but there's something that's holding them back. They just can't quite do it. They want to, but they think, *I can't go to church, I am not sure that I believe in all of that.* But the disciples didn't kick Thomas out. God didn't kick him out. Thomas wasn't sure yet, God said, okay, then I will even let you do this. I think this is so comforting.

David: Well, I remember now . . . this is going to date me so much. (laughter) Does anybody remember a person by the name of Kurt Warner?

Peter: Oh, I do.

David: So, Kurt Warner played football.

Peter: For the St. Louis Rams.

David: He brought us to the Super Bowl. Kurt Warner was a Christian, and there was this Christian sports rally. I had a friend who was going to go and I kind of rolled my eyes. Are you really going to take your son to that? It's going to have this theology of glory, that if you believe in God, then your football team's going to win. And he said, *my son likes football and I'm taking him there because maybe he'll meet Jesus. That's where he is at.*

Peter: One way to do it is to have people identify with Thomas, but I'm kind of intrigued by the other two apostles in the painting who are looking over the shoulder and thinking about a God who does that for him. We could be the ones looking over the shoulder, because I certainly don't want to stick my finger in there.

Jessica: Well, if the two other men in the painting were disciples that had seen Jesus, the looks on their faces in this painting still look pretty surprised. They're looking with the same intensity, like they can't believe what they're seeing.

David: And that's what I would do at the end of the sermon, explore how there're two beautiful things that are surprising. Number one, obviously the most important, the risen Lord, which Thomas is encountering in a very real way here. But then second, the other surprising thing is the willingness of this risen Lord to start where Thomas is at.

Peter: I'm just thinking . . . on Easter Sunday, there's a lot of people who are there for all sorts of reasons. It's one of the big high holy days. I always want to give people a good reason to come back the following week. I mean, you trust that when you preach the gospel on Easter Sunday, it's going to do what God wants it to do. There may be some people who are coming back and who are still pretty new to the whole thing. You'd kind of want to hope for that and then have that in mind as you preach, right? And so then come back next Sunday and we'll see more of what kind of a God rules for you, what kind of a God has risen and come and now rules for you. We could build something out of this.

Jessica: And give people permission to come back, even though they're not sure they believe it yet.

David: Right. And each time they get a different picture of the kind of Jesus that has risen.

Jessica: And they're still welcome. They don't have to wait until they understand God perfectly.

David: Right.

Jessica: That's wonderful. Peter, what would you preach on?

Peter: Well, kind of building on what we were just talking about . . . when I was a pastor, I always felt like it was maybe helpful and important to give people an explicit reason to come back after the highest festivals. I'd always start a sermon series the Sunday after Easter and I'd publicize it in the Easter Sunday bulletin so that people who were so inclined would say, oh, there's something worth starting. It's an easy on-ramp, and it's defined by the season of Easter, so it's not like we're starting this 27-week series on whatever, but you've got six weeks, basically. This to me was always important. I always paid attention, especially to the epistle readings in the season of Easter, because each year there's a different epistle that we focus on. I think what I might do is spend this season of Easter focusing on First John. The nice thing about First John is it's a short letter. It's compact. You can dig into it for a whole season, for a month and a half. I would probably try to pair it with some Bible study or a reading plan for the congregation. So, we could just spend the season of Easter focusing on the gospel according to First John. I could spend six straight weeks just chewing on First John and maybe get a couple of commentaries and do some further study and get to know this book really well. I would encourage a pastor who's going to do this to spend a little time just getting into the context of First John.

This is a letter of course that John wrote at the end of his life, probably 90, 100 AD or so. It was written in a very political context. He's very protective of the church. He's the last of the apostles probably, and he is very concerned about deceivers—those who are probably twisting the gospel. And so, it's like any old man who is just kind of unfiltered and tired of beating around the bush—I'm just going to give it to you straight. I think I

would want to cast this series as "Old Man John, Unfiltered" straight from the Old Man . . . themes like life and truth and love. Tell people on Easter Sunday, we're going to focus on some of these big themes, life, truth, love.

That would be kind of all preparation for this first sermon. Now, when I do a series, at least on something like this, the challenge with a series of sermons is that you have to keep each sermon distinct. Having texts that you preach on helps with that, but you also need to introduce the series. If I were going to do this, I would say on Easter Sunday, we'll focus on John's perspective a little bit and then prepare the way for this letter that John wrote decades later. That could tie to the Easter sermon.

David: Would you deal at all with the fact that he was a beloved disciple of the Lord?

Peter: Well, 1 John 4 is one of the readings. It's the fourth or fifth week. "Beloved, Let us love one another for lovers of God." Of course, with a series, when you're focusing on a letter from an individual through the course of series, you can bring out various things . . .

David: About that individual.

Peter: Right. I think *hope*, because love is not a big theme in this first text. I'd maybe hold that back for later on in the series. So, as I'm thinking about this sermon, of course you have to spend a little bit of time in introduction, but for the sermon itself for this text, I thought of a game. You've played that game, Jessica, *two truths and a lie?*

Jessica: Oh yes, it's a great icebreaker if you are leading a high school Bible study to get people talking, get people laughing.

Peter: How does it go?

Jessica: Everybody has to think of two true things about themselves and a lie. Each person shares those three statements, and the others have to guess which is which. You have to pick a lie that sounds really true, and truths that are strange. It's fun because you find out these shocking things about people.

Peter: Yeah. So, I'm thinking about the structure of two truths and a lie. You could have a little bit of fun introducing it. When I read this text, I see two

truths and a lie. I think maybe I'd organize a sermon along those lines. And so maybe we could start, Jessica, would you read verses one through three?

Jessica: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest, and we've seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ."

Peter: Alright. John starts by saying *that which we have seen . . . That's what we're testifying.* He doesn't use the word truth in those verses, but he's saying, we're speaking the truth here. And so, this could be an entry into, What truth are you speaking? The first truth I would emphasize, I think, again, you could frame this a couple of different ways, but just on first glance, I'm thinking about this idea that God is light. You've got *God is light, in him is no darkness at all.* What made me think of it was the connections here to the Gospel of John are really strong. Light and life. I'd want to go back and reread John chapter one from the gospel, in him was light. The darkness did not overcome him. We're on the second Sunday of Easter right now so I'd want to have some connections to maybe even the morning, the light. One of the gospel writers explicitly says, "while it was still dark, they went to the tomb." So, this light/darkness theme is the first truth that I want to highlight, and I want to do it with an Easter accent. God is light, the light of the world that not even darkness can overcome. So, truth number one: God is light. Truth number two: we have fellowship in the light. We have fellowship in Christ. Easter is not just for individuals, but it brings us into this community. This is what I was thinking when I was looking at these texts, I was thinking there's this language of the fellowship that we have in the light. Verse seven, can you read verse seven, Jessica?

Jessica: "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son cleanses us from all sin."

Peter: It's interesting to me that John says there, *if we walk in the light as he is in the light*, he doesn't go straight to our cleansing from sin. He first starts with fellowship with one another, that we have this community and that we are together in this. And he also cleanses us from sin.

So, the first two truths—God is light. Jesus, the light of the world, and there's fellowship in the light. I do love that in Acts four they shared, they cared for one another. They didn't consider any of the things that belonged to them as their own. Everything in common. We talk about being one body, and we talk about being church, but this is a real substantive, thorough fellowship where we're sharing and we're really in life together. And that's a really important truth that comes out of Easter.

David: And that whole idea of fellowship that resonates in the earlier portion too, when *what we have heard and see, we proclaim to you so that you might have fellowship with us*, right?

Peter: Right. So, this is the fellowship we have. And then go on a little bit further in verse three. *And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ.* The fellowship that God has with God, the Father has with Jesus, has with John, and the apostles also has with all of us who are in Christ. So, the fellowship is the second truth. Then that comes to the lie. Several lies are mentioned in this text in verse six. *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie.* Now, this kind of calls out Christians for walking in ways that are dark and deceitful, and we're lying if we do this.

There's a lie in verse six, here's also a lie in verse eight. Would you read verse eight, Jessica?

Jessica: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Peter: Now, what struck me about this one is if we say we have no sin, we deceive whom? Well, not our neighbors.

Jessica: They already know.

Peter: They already know. God certainly already knows, but we deceive ourselves . . . We tell ourselves that I have no blame here, or I have no guilt here, or we lie to ourselves if we're saying we have no sin.

David: And then look at the lie in verse 10, right?

Peter: Yeah. Verse 10. *We have made him a liar.*

David: *If we say, we have not sinned, we have made him a liar.* Right?

Peter: So, you've actually got two truths and three lies!

David: You've got the opportunity to choose the one that best fits your context, right?

Peter: Yeah. This really does allow you to think about who you're talking to, and which lies are prominent. So old man John is writing this letter and he's writing to Christians of his day and the lies they've been deceived by. Now your job, in some ways, is not so much to talk about John in his context, but to speak in the same line as John did to his people. You speak to your people.

David: So now, what's the reasoning of putting the lie last?

Peter: Well, I thought about that, one reasoning would be it fits with the theme of the two truths and a lie, right? If I follow that structure, I would not want to end it with deception and lies. This is where verse nine would be really helpful. *If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us.* So, I'd maybe work backwards from verse 10 to verse 9 and proclaim the promise that even when we deceive ourselves, we have a God who is faithful and just.

David: Yeah. I mean, you've got that opportunity to share with us how the truth defeats the lie.

Peter: The lie could be that there's no forgiveness for me. And then you could emphasize verse 9, he will forgive us, and he will cleanse us . . . So, I think you've got some variety, but I think that especially if I were going to go with a theme of *Old Man*, John is giving us kind of an unfiltered message through this season, and today he's going to speak very clearly about a couple of truths and a really dangerous lie.

David: So, the theme is like *John Unfiltered*,

Peter: Maybe the series would be something like that. *John Unfiltered*.

David: I like that. *John Unfiltered*. Oh man, that's good.

Jessica: That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org That is also where you'll find episodes of our other podcast "*Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived*" where I'll talk with a variety of professors on a variety of topics, but all pointing the ways in which faith permeates all aspects of life.

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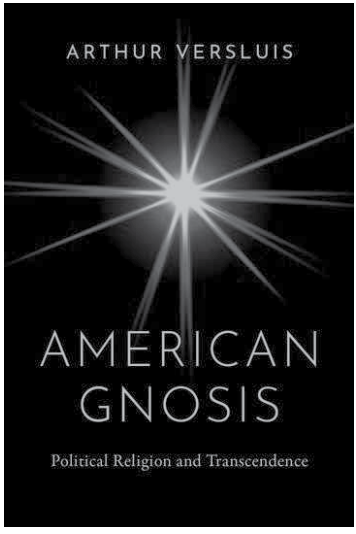
Reviews

AMERICAN GNOSIS: Political Religion and Transcendence. *By Arthur Versluis. Oxford University Press, 2024. 282 pages. $90.00.*

Ignorant of the author, but familiar enough with the subjects in his title, I delved into *American Gnosis* cognizant of both my expectations and my ignorance. Reading the text shattered both: my expectations were altogether inaccurate, but my lack of knowing has been remediated. I now have gnosis. Well, I don't have the gnosis that Versluis has—nor do I desire it—but the Professor of Religious Studies at MSU in East Lansing has succeeded in initiating me into increased knowledge of a subject I thought I knew.

Of course, with gnosis everything is about knowing—along with a hefty dose of mysticism, metaphysics, political displacement, cosmology, and a raft of disparate ideas that are frankly simply bizarre. The bizarre aspects of what the author counts as modern American manifestations of forms of Gnosticism appear throughout the book but are concentrated primarily in four successive chapters when the work of specific figures Miguel Serrano, Samael Aun Weor, Charles Musès, and Christopher Bache are considered. The breadth of the bizarre is bewildering: UFOs, Hitlerism, esoteric symbolism of the number 17, spine-spiraling serpents, astrological convergences, shapeshifting-reptilian aliens impersonating political leaders, LSD, and so, so much more. Indeed, much of the book seems to be but an exercise in testing the bounds of what can be deemed acceptable within the confines of an academic publication. Even one of the endorsements on the dustjacket notes the book's "cast of characters at the limits of respectability." But Versluis seems determined to treat the fantastic and what I, (guilty, no doubt of being a philistine obscurantist) would deem simply ludicrous and unworthy of serious study. There is no tongue anywhere near a cheek as the author presents long nonsense quotes that are the stuff of science fiction or hallucinogenic trips. No doubt he has accumulated some experience in such work as the editor of *JSR: Journal for the Study of Radicalism*.



All was not lost, however. And in spite of too many moments when I felt like an undergrad slogging through a required text for a required course for which there was zero affinity, there were nuggets to be gained. Versluis's distinction between neo-gnosticism and what he considers true Gnosticism was

insightful and useful. Neo-gnosticism maps with a cosmological gnosticism that never moves past the contest for supremacy of truth in this world—whether battling archons or aliens or Agent Smith. True Gnosticism, or the metaphysical version, is aimed at ultimate transcendence of the entire world thus overcoming all dualisms and conflict in a unified enlightenment of genuine, liberating knowledge. In other words, it's one thing to know we are just batteries powering an alien cosmology, and it's another thing altogether to know that the cosmos itself is just part of something transcendently greater that unifies all that is. Such are the distinctions between neo-gnosis and Gnosis. Versluis seems to be holding out for the latter while he offers a remarkable account of the ubiquitous and pervasive influence of the former at all levels of twenty-first-century American life. The payoff is immediate as the author notes, "We can see neo-gnosticism engages some of the most fundamental questions about politics and religion in a contemporary context, and foregrounds the opposition between the political left and right" (239). Indeed, a great benefit of the book is the clarity this approach brings to one's grasp of the realities of Trumpism, Christian Nationalism, and the categorical mistake of labeling everything "woke" as somehow gnostic—a failing for which he impugns Rod Dreher(165).

American Gnosis was full of surprises and integrates topics that are seemingly altogether incompatible. I learned much. But, perhaps what I learned most is the remarkable state of the academy. Whether Versluis and his tribe is typical others may decide, but he does have a nod from OUP on his side. As our culture continues to crumble over the edge as modernity collapses, the scramble to answer basic questions of human meaning, purpose, and fulfillment will only accelerate. There are untold legions of scholars, charlatans, and kooks ready with their answers. The church has what the dying modern world needs: truth based not on mere assertion, daydreams, spiritual yearning, hallucinations, or ancient accounts of the same, but truth based on a man who declared himself to be God's truth and then came back from the dead to prove himself true. This is the message, and the knowledge, the church must resolutely declare—it is, after all, the only knowledge that counts.

Joel Biermann

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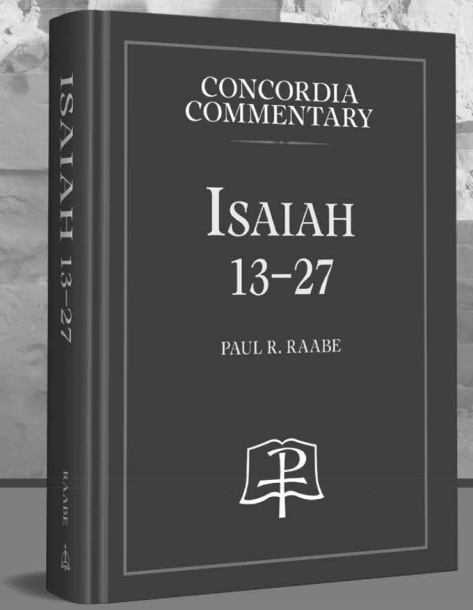

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