

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS

- AE *Luther's Works*. American edition. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958- .
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- BAG 1st ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAGD 2nd ed., edited by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979.
- BDAG 3rd ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker, 2000.
- BELK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 12 editions. [Cite edition used.] Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930- .
- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984.
- LW *Lutheran Worship*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1982.
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964- .
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1941.
- W² Walch, Johann Georg, ed. *D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften*. 2nd ["St. Louis"] ed. 23 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimarer Ausgabe. ["Weimar ed."] Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883- .
- WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible]
- WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters]
- WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk]

Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings:

- AC Augsburg Confession
- Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- SA Smalcald Articles
- Tr Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- SC Small Catechism
- LC Large Catechism
- FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
- FC SD Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

From 31 March to 4 April 2004, the International Lutheran Council, a council of confessional Lutheran churches of which Lutheran Church–Canada is a member, held its second World Seminaries Conference. The conference was held in Erfurt, Germany, in the *Augustinerkloster*, where Luther lived during the years immediately following his monastic vows. At this conference, Lutheran theological educators from throughout the world gathered to hear papers on and discuss the subject of “Luther and the Work of the Pastor”. This volume of *Lutheran Theological Review* presents four of the sectional papers that were given at that conference: three from seminary professors of LCC and one from a close friend of our church.

Edward Kettner leads off these papers with a discussion of the place of polemics in the presentation of the Christian faith, noting that the presentation of the Gospel and the proper teaching of theology must always include the refutation of error. Following this, Wilbert Kreiss of the Evangelical Lutheran Church–Synod of France and Belgium deals with the question of recognizing and encouraging gifts for pastoral vocation, and in particular deals with the importance of encouraging men to prepare for entering the Office of Public Ministry (an issue important to us as we deal with issues concerning ministerial recruitment). John Stephenson then discusses the question of evaluating candidates for pastoral suitability, noting the importance both of theological competence and spiritual maturity. Finally, Thomas Winger looks at the topic of rhetoric and media in the judgement of Saint Paul, using Paul as a template to discuss the question as to whether any and all forms of media may legitimately be used in the proclamation of the Gospel.

In addition to these timely and provocative papers, this issue also presents a discussion of the use of the term “Holy” in American Sign Language, written by Richard Beinert. Beinert notes that different signs put forth different connotations of “holiness”, which will impact the way in which the signer will present the idea. This essay demonstrates the challenge and importance of finding the right word to convey proper understanding in any language.

This issue begins with a short study by Erwin Breese on the subject of wine, beer and bread, which notes the benefits and graces given by God through eating and drinking, and ties the physical to the sacramental. It concludes with a sermon by John Wilch on Psalm 116:15, where we are reminded that our deaths, as well as our lives, are precious to God.

So in this volume we see how God speaks to and through the pastoral office. The articles outline the responsibilities inherent in the office, and in

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the church, for properly communicating God's Good News in words, media, and physical acts. We pray that this issue will enlighten and edify its readers.

EGK

Monday of the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost 2005

SHORT STUDY: WINE, BEER, AND BREAD

Erwin A. Brese

Can it be true that today Lutherans are really a generic Protestant (read Reformed) denomination that just has a thing about sacraments tacked on? Is the Sacrament of the Altar really an optional ritual that is present only by tradition and not by the Gospel? Hopefully this article will stir some imagination and creative thinking on this subject in a most practical way.

I. EARLY BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

The created world included the nourishing foods of the tree (Gen. 2:9) and field according to Genesis. After expulsion from Eden, food supply is more of a struggle and work (3:17-18). Cain is seen as the farmer of grains, probably barley and maybe wheat (4:2). From these are made bread and beer. The fruit of the vine also shows up early among the people of God. The vineyard is often used as a metaphor for the people of God (e.g. Is. 5:1ff.; see also Mt. 21:33-41). Bread becomes a symbol of life itself, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. These, then, are life giving nourishment; gifts from the Creator sustain this life and point ahead to gifts yet to come. Grain and wine are blessings from the Creator (Prov. 3:9, 10).

Later, as God chooses a people, Israel, a ritualized Passover meal is instituted as a remembrance of the delivering power of their God, eating bread dipped in bitter herbs, and eating Lamb, symbols of their life as pilgrims through this world (Ex. 12:43ff.). Drinking wine at the Passover alluded to the belief that life was in the blood.

In a fallen world, every good and perfect gift brings with it the curse of abuse, and the influence of mankind that has continued to produce ways to abuse themselves and every gift of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Noah appears as a prototype drunkard in Genesis 9:21. It exposes him to shame. Such stories continue in biblical narrative and recorded history (see Prov. 31:4-7).

II. SOME HISTORY

From the records of secular history we learn that alcoholic drinks are common to every culture and civilization. The first recorded recipes for brewing are found in cuneiform in Mesopotamia, then in Egyptian

hieroglyphs. While evidence of beer making and drinking are found in these areas, wine seemed to have predominance because of the abundance of grapes. More northern climes have seen beer predominate since barley is a hardy grain that can be grown in shorter growing season areas. No doubt, this influenced the Talmudic rabbi's recommendation that if you are in the Jewish Diaspora and find yourself in a country in which there is no wine for Passover celebration, substituting beer is perfectly in order.

According to evolutionary-thinking historians, credit is often given to the growing of grains for bread and beer to the move from a nomadic hunter life to more settled farming. How these foods were discovered and first enjoyed is open to much speculation, not the least of which is that God showed Adam and Eve about these things Himself.

In any case, grains get wet enough so that they sprout into malt, turning starchy kernels into sugars. The ensuing sugar-water is worked upon by airborne yeast (called by the ancients: "the god factor" since they could see nothing but the evidence of its presence) to transform the liquid into a type of beer, changing the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. To witness this foaming action on the surface of the liquid was an awesome testimony to the work of the mysterious gods among people. The saying is old and true: people can make the "must" (grape juice) or "wort" (liquid malt sugars) or "dough" (flour and sugar), but only God can make it into wine, beer, or bread.

Wine develops in an even easier way than beer. When grapes are squeezed for their juice, the yeast that clings to the fruit as well as that which is airborne eagerly gets to work on the sugars present. We now call this process fermentation. It just happens everywhere with other fruits or sugars whenever exposed to the air. Witness the behavioural change of animals that eat rotting fruits. It proceeds at its own pace and speed, depending upon its abundance and temperature. The older biblical word often used for yeast is leaven.

Only by trial and error were many things learned about how to make better wine, beer, and bread. The yeast which makes bread rise is also present everywhere, but bakers learned that if you save a bit of raised dough and add it to a fresh batch, it will work quicker. A clay pot or cask of wood that was used for fermentation before will start a new batch quicker, because yeast will reside in it. Native American tribes used to put a new pot near a "working" pot so that the old one could teach the new one how to do its job.

Nevertheless, every batch of bread, cask of beer or wine, was considered a gift from the gods for humans to enjoy. It was also found to be nutritious, and even safer than drinking water, which had been contaminated with other bugs that could not be seen. The alcohol in the beer and wine killed off such germs. Baking the bread with a hot fire did the same. In Eastern cultures, the drinking of tea became wide spread as a way to keep from getting

sicknesses. It was the boiling of the water than sanitized things. In our Western world, the making and monitoring of beers and wines was under church control for much of post-biblical history. This proved both a bane and blessing.

One can only speculate about the making of the broth as Gideon was instructed to do (Jdg. 6:19-21), but it brought about the appearance of God's angel. Land that produced vineyards was very desirable and highly prized. On the other hand, barley is hardy and grows easily even in rocky soils. Harvest time was a celebration of the favour of God. The drinking of wine and "strong drink"¹ was common at festivals and celebrations as well as to present as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.²

III. NEW TESTAMENT INSIGHTS

In the New Testament find ourselves in a near-Eastern culture under subjugation first by western Greece and later Rome. Both East and West have history and experience in the preparing and use of breads, wines and beer. Jesus uses this backdrop for teaching some important aspects of the Kingdom He proclaims.

First, He makes water into wine at a family wedding (John 2). The choice of using the water from the clay pot meant for ritual washings and cleansing is instructive. The vast amount of wine presented is also worthy of note. Certainly in this transformation, Jesus is blessing and redeeming the use of wine for human consumption, even most abundantly (Cf. Lk. 5:36-39). He takes the ordinary, the water, and infuses Himself into the process of making wine.

Wine means fermenting or fermented juice, both then and now. If it was just squeezed, it would be called juice,³ but in the John 2 story the tasters agreed that the wine presented to them was "the good stuff". Good wine is juice left to ferment to its peak position of dryness, flavour, and bouquet. However, after that peak, if the liquid is exposed to air (oxygen), wine turns into vinegar, a less pleasant drink but useful for cooking, etc.

Hence Jesus made superior wine that was more than appropriate for the occasion as the steward testifies. The official tasters said this was better than

¹ The New International Version translation of strong drink seems to mean "beer". See the American Bible Society's Contemporary English Version, which also wisely translates "unleavened bread" with "thin bread".

² For the interested reader, these expansive themes can be expanded and traced in fuller detail with the aid of a concordance.

³ [Editor's note: in Greek usage οἶνος, from which our English word "wine" derives, meant that a beverage was fermented; if unqualified, it is assumed to be wine from grapes. The word for "must" or unfermented juice is τρυγίς, which does not appear in the NT. – TMW]

the first wine meant to greet the drinker with pleasant tastes and aromas. After the senses were gradually dulled by alcohol, then vinegary types. Or, if it was harvest time, fresh juice could be pressed and served. Jesus was in favour of having the party continue well for the enjoyment of all present. There were probably plenty of leftovers, reminiscent of Jesus turning loaves and fish into more than sufficient food for thousands of people (Mk 6:30ff.).

Secondly, Jesus also chastises the more pietistic hearers of the day (Lk. 5:33-39). He says they act as foolish as those who put fresh wine (juice just starting to ferment) into old wineskins do. Old animal skins, for example, a goatskin, were used as containers in those days. The feet and head holes were tied off, the skin filled and tied off, making it suitable for storage or transport. Now an old skin would be dried and easily split apart if fermentation happened inside with the pressure of the carbon dioxide gas building up. Some modern home-brewers have experienced this phenomenon with exploding glass bottles.⁴

Not only was Jesus teaching them about the new covenant God was making with His people, but calling His hearers away from the traditions that they had turned into gods, leaving no room for God's fresh ferment to come into their lives without destruction and loss. He warns His followers that this Pharisaic attitude is also as active as yeast (Mk 8:15), and is to be avoided. Thus we see Jesus using the fermentation process to illustrate the good and healthy life in the Kingdom, as well as the evil opposite.

Thirdly, the ultimate presentation of the meaning of wine and bread come in Jesus' final Passover that is transformed into the Lord's Supper and our Eucharist continuation of that meal today. In the context of this remembrance meal marking the beginning of the exodus from Egyptian slavery, Jesus acts as host for those going forward into the land of promise. In the midst of this lengthy and most profound meal, He distributes bread, each tearing a piece from the one loaf (Mt. 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26; Lk. 22:7-30).

Whether it is traditional unleavened bread, baked in haste in Egypt, or ordinary bread that is allowed to rise before being baked, is not the real point. In reality all bread contains yeast. It is present in the air. Today we can see it under a microscope. So "unleavened" means bread that had no chance to rise. Once bread is placed into the oven, the yeast is killed by temperatures over 60°C (140°F).

Those who live in the new covenant may well see in the risen and fully baked loaf the body of our Risen Lord and of His church, to be broken and distributed among and for us. It emphasizes the death component in the reception of this meal.

⁴ [Editor's note: I can testify to this personally. – TMW]

On the other hand, the other element, wine, is alive, or always has been until more modern days of pasteurization or treatment with anti-yeast chemicals. Can it be proper to use wine that is dead, in which the yeast have been killed or immobilized, to proclaim the hope of the heavenly banquet of life? Wine bottles with screw-on caps are a dead give-away that the liquid has been killed. Wines and beers with sediment on the bottom (yeast cells) in corked and/or wired bottles give evidence of life inside. To be sure, God makes life out of death and does indeed, do the same in the Eucharist, but the presentation of dead bread and living wine have much to commend themselves, and not just for the sake of ancient traditions.

Indeed, the procedure of having some in the community bring their home-baked bread and homemade wine to present to the Lord has much to commend. The miracle is that He turns it around and gives us His Body and Blood, brings His people to stand in awe of the “real God factor”, beyond nature and the understandable to the mysterious presence that leads us to and through death into life. “Take, eat”, “take, drink”, call out loud and clearly.

IV. COMMUNITY

Whether it's been harvesting the grain, gathering the grapes, or enjoying the fruits of their labour, the use of beer, wine, and bread has been a community endeavour. Indeed, it evokes community work and play by its history and nature. To work alone, to eat and drink alone, are violations of the purposes of the Creator, let alone a serious symptom of a sick society and/or church. Even the sliced loaf departs from the broken bread symbolism of ragged edges produced when pieces of bread are taken from the loaf to be shared with the body of the community.

If people are looked upon as mechanized consuming machines needing replenishment of only chemical and biological ingredients, not unlike a car that continues to need gas to run, then the emotional and spiritual benefits are lost. Whether it be the Church's Eucharist, or the wine, beer, and bread of daily life, the participation of the community is important. With whom you bread, becomes the community in which you belong. The world says, you are what you eat. A deeper reality is you are with whom you eat. So for the family, reunions, baptismal and birth celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, funerals, and even the old Sunday afternoon gathering of the clan, are more appropriate settings for the sharing of wine, bread, and beer.

The congregational anniversaries, picnics, Oktoberfests, festivals and other gatherings of the community are also most appropriate times to eat and drink together.

V. TODAY'S SCENE

In twentieth-century North America, the extremes in the law demonstrate the pendulums of history upon which world history swings. At the beginning of the century, the promotion of Prohibition came into law in the United States in 1919 and continued into the economic depression, ending in 1933.⁵ Many reasonable factors urged such laws to be enacted, not the least of which were the breweries' practice of paying their employees in the back of their taverns, and then expecting them to buy a round for everybody in the place before they could leave. To be sure, this did not set well with wives at home counting on a full paycheque to manage the household money. Other practices also incited the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

However, enforcement of Prohibition soon became nearly impossible. Many German Lutheran communities (e.g. Frankenmuth, MI) ignored the law, since it was extremely counter-cultural to them. The Irish felt the same. Many people made their own bathtub gin, and people went blind from drinking unregulated liquor from backwoods stills. As was said: Prohibition turned everyone into a criminal. In fact, the use of harder liquors grew because smaller bottles could be concealed easier. "Tea houses" and other such euphonious phrases abounded. Prohibition was repealed, but with its consequences. The small, local breweries and wineries gave way to the mega-companies of today with mass-market appeal that strips away more basic understandings of food and drink.

More recently we are faced with growing scientific evidence that alcohol, in moderate quantities, enhances daily adult life with health-giving benefits. Monasteries have known this for centuries where the annual Lenten fast is to live on beer (liquid bread) alone for 40 days. However healthy beer and wine may be, the old-fashioned home-brewed beer and wine, with living yeast in it, still provides more healthy benefits than the chemical cocktails that pass off as beer and wine from large breweries and wineries. Besides, when shared in the home, in the community of a wedding celebration, in the enhancing of other times of ritual and spontaneous family and community celebration, it has more meaning and health-giving ingredients than science can ever measure. Drinking beer and wine have always been more healthful in community. Something turns destructive when individuals drink alone.

Addictions are part of our highly anxious society. Many people's lives are pained and scarred by the abusive drinking of family leaders. Yet, the ongoing presence of alcohol has continued from ancient times. It was used as an anaesthetic years ago and still is used by some in a fruitless attempt to

⁵ [Editor's note: the beginning and end of Prohibition in Canada varied from province to province, extending to all provinces and territories during WWI. But it ended much sooner than in the U.S., as early as 1919 in Quebec, with Nova Scotia the last in 1930. – TMW]

escape the pains in their existence. So there exists the addiction to strong drink that becomes a god for some.

However, there is also an addiction to abstinence that can also be a works-righteous claim of many for their own salvation. Strong drink is tied to intense feelings and strong persuasions in the lives of many. Some avoid it like the most terrible of plagues; others turning to it far too frequently as an unhealthy way to handle personal pain and anxiety. However, somewhere in Martin Luther's table talk it says: "Beer is a gift of God to be enjoyed. Little fools will always drink too much. Bigger fools will never enjoy it at all."

So life is more than bread alone, said Jesus (Lk. 4:3, 4). Yet to live with its presence in our Christian daily life is a part of the *tentatio*⁶ that puts the faithful through needed experiences so they may live in the hope of a future heavenly banquet that overflows with the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:29). The Word is connected to water and the bread and wine in the Sacraments we practise as gifts of God and means of His grace to us. Just as the Word is dangerous to handle, so also are the sacramental elements, but they hold promise and give life. Yet the Word comes to us in, with, and under these earthly elements chosen by God to convey His grace.

So the fermentation process requires patience and nurture. So also does the Gospel and the Spirit that gives it. Likewise yeast works at its own pace, in and with good wine, beer, and breads to give rewarding results in due time.⁷

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⁶ See Steven A. Hein's fine article in *LTR* 10 (1997-98): 29-47.

⁷ For further reading: Stephen Harold Buhner, *Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers* (Boulder, CO, Siris Books, 1998); Roger Protz, *The Taste of Beer* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998); Stephen R. Powell, *Rushing the Growler: A History of Brewing in Buffalo* (Buffalo, NY: Apogee Productions, 1999); Gregg Smith, *Beer, a History of Suds and Civilization from Mesopotamia to Microbreweries* (New York: Avon Books, 1995).

**GOD IS “HOLY”:
A DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION
OF A REGIONALLY INTRODUCED SIGN**

Richard A. Beinert

During my work among the Deaf¹ population of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia,² I was both intrigued and challenged by the diversity of Signs which the local Deaf used within their idiom for day-to-day communication. This was nothing particularly new for me since American Sign Language (ASL) is known to have regional dialects which are dynamic and constantly in flux.³ Further, since the Okanagan is only more recently becoming a retirement destination for Deaf families and individuals, it was not unexpected to find a variety of Signs present and in common use as individuals imported them into the valley from their previous place of residence. Some of these Signs were not always mutually understandable by everyone within the local Deaf population. What was a surprise, however, was when one of the local Deaf people proceeded to correct me in the use of what I had considered to be a “standard” Sign for preaching and teaching about the character of God. “We use ‘holy’ (B) and not ‘holy’ (A). God is ‘holy’ (B)—it’s a better Sign”,⁴ I was told. An interpreter from the Vernon area later informed me that the local Deaf community had invented this Sign (B) because they had found the standard

¹ This paper will follow the accepted practice as established in Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), 2, of capitalizing the term “Deaf” when used in reference to a cultural identity and the community as a whole. The non-capitalized form “deaf” is used only as an adjective in reference to the physical condition of not hearing. “DEAF is a means of identifying the group and one’s connection to it, and ‘deaf’ is a means of commenting on one’s ability to speak and hear.” Padden & Humphries, 39.

² Deaf work in the Okanagan began in the year 2000 with a preaching station sponsored by Redeemer Lutheran Church in Westbank. This preaching station met in the Winfield area initially in the home of an orchardist family with one Deaf child, and then later, as the group expanded, in the hall of the Lake Country Alliance Church of the same Okanagan community.

³ “Like all other languages, ASL has variation: people from different places often sign differently.” James Woodward, “Sociolinguistic Research on American Sign Language: An Historical Perspective”, in *Sign Language and the Deaf Community: Essays in Honor of William C. Stokoe*, ed. Charlotte Baker & Robbin Battison (National Association of the Deaf, 1980), 119. See also Carol Sue Bailey & Kathy Dolby eds, *The Canadian Dictionary of ASL* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), xxxi-xxxii and Harry W. Hoemann, *Introduction to American Sign Language* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Press, 1986), 4, 15.

⁴ I have used (A) and (B) to refer to the two different Signs that the Deaf person used: (A) being the standard or traditional Sign and (B) being the locally introduced Sign as used within the Okanagan Valley. Both Signs will be described and evaluated in this paper.

Sign for “holy” (A) to be too abstract and confusing.⁵ Upon further reflection, it became evident that the introduction of this new Sign into the local Deaf vocabulary was more than a simple case of lexical substitution of one Sign for another—it was an attempt on the part of the Okanagan Deaf community to conceptually concretize their relationship with God within the parameters both of ASL, Deaf culture, and that of Biblical imagery.

A brief overview of the nature of both ASL and Deaf culture will help the non-signing reader to better grasp the significance of this point. Unlike verbal languages, ASL is a visual language that communicates its ideas through a flow of gestures that are drawn in the air with the hands and through the body-expressions of the signer.⁶ These gestures are often iconic in their form and execution—that is, they represent visually and gesturally some aspect of the object or concept which the signer wishes to communicate.⁷ As a result, the choices of Sign as well as the manner in which it is executed both have an impact upon what is communicated and the nuances of how it is understood.⁸ Many describing qualities normally communicated in adjectives or adverbs within spoken languages can thus easily be integrated into a single Sign (i.e. “driving quickly” or “hot potato”)⁹ for the purposes of communication among the Deaf. In this way, the attention of the signee is kept focused and anchored on the actors and actions within the message as gesturally made present and so communicated through the hands of the signer. Just like word selection in a spoken language, the choice of Sign for the purpose of communication is both deliberate and essential to the message as it is being communicated.

A further point that bears mentioning in reference to ASL and the Deaf community is derived from the visual nature of the culture and language. Both physical and visual presence is vital and necessary for relationship and communication within a Deaf community context. ASL by its very nature is a language that embodies and “makes visually present” the thoughts and

⁵ This history behind the regional Sign was explained to me by Mrs Charleyne Peters of Vernon, British Columbia. Mrs Peters has served as a volunteer Church interpreter at both the Reformed and Alliance Churches in Vernon. It should be noted however that some Deaf continue to use the standard Sign (A) both out of habit and preference.

⁶ “Signer” is the equivalent in ASL for a “speaker” in a spoken language.

⁷ “Many religious signs are iconic, that is, they resemble some aspect of the object or character of the object they represent.” Elaine Costello, *Religious Signing: The New Comprehensive Guide for All Faiths* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), xiv. See also *Canadian Dictionary*, xix; and Hoemann, 34.

⁸ Each Sign corresponds to a particular meaning which is expressed visually. As Hoemann points out, “it is meanings that are translated, not words or signs.” Hoemann, 9. Thus where conventional wisdom teaches us that “a picture is worth a thousand words”, ASL takes this as a basis for a well rounded system of communication.

⁹ See Hoemann, 73-74, 92-93.

stories of the signer.¹⁰ Absence, as a result, is silence, while presence is communion. Consequently, Signs which are intended to communicate a non-visual concept are by their very nature more difficult to grasp. As these considerations are transposed upon the spiritual life of the Deaf community, the introduction of the new Sign (B) by the Okanagan Deaf becomes apparent and clear. The new Sign for “holy” (B) represents an attempt of the part of the valley Deaf community to concretize their relationship with God by making Him visually present (and thus more “real”) within the medium of ASL and the Deaf linguistic-cultural worldview.

Against this linguistic and cultural backdrop, it is possible to better understand the comment that the standard Sign for “holy” (A) was perceived as abstract and that the new Sign (B) was considered better. A brief description of each of the Signs will help to illustrate this point.

The standard or traditional Sign for “holy” (A) is the Sign for “clean” executed with an **H** (for **H**oly) initialized¹¹ in the right hand (Figure 1).¹² This Sign is intended to communicate the notion that God is clean and pure without stain or spot of sin—“holy”—following a standard definition of the term as understood within our dogmatics textbooks.¹³ Other Signs within the same gestural family¹⁴ include “clean”, “wash”, “forgive”, as well as “pure”, thus setting the traditional Sign for “holy” within a broad category of similar ideas. Grammatically, the Sign is always used adjectivally to apply an attribute to its nominal object. There is never an



Figure 1

¹⁰ One could argue that ASL has a unique “incarnational” character rooted in the way in which it brings into visual presence the content of the message, thus fleshing it out for the person to see and encounter. It would be interesting to further explore this facet of ASL for the sake of teaching and preaching.

¹¹ An “initialized” Sign is a Sign executed with a letter of the manual alphabet gestured in one or both hands. This is a common linguistic device used in ASL in order to diversify the base inventory of signed gestures to correspond to a variety of English words and concepts. See Hoemann, 34-36.

¹² Taken from Lottie L. Riekehof, *The Joy of Signing*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1987), 311.

¹³ See for example Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:456.

¹⁴ In the same way that spoken languages are built from families of phonetic sounds and word roots (phonemes and morphemes), ASL terms are built up around gestural hand-shapes and motions. (See for example the front and back inside covers of the *Canadian Dictionary* for a comprehensive listing of hand-shapes used within Canadian ASL for word-building.) ASL vocabulary can be divided into gestural families based upon these features often sharing a common semantic or conceptual tie as well. In a sense, one could speak of these words as the ASL equivalent of **rhyming** words.

instance where “holy” (A) would be used independently (i.e. nominally) as a reference to God.

“Holiness”, however, is a concept that is difficult to visualize. Unlike blue, dirty, or pretty, the concept of holy does not immediately evoke a visual image. It could certainly be argued that its base image is that of “clean”-ness, but when applied to an invisible object (namely “God’s unseen divinity”, in this instance), clean and dirty have little visual semantic value. In what sense could God be “dirty” or “clean”? The initialized **H** only further complicates the semantic field, compounding a visual contradiction with the conceptual nuances of English that, it must be remembered, is a foreign language for the Deaf. The awkwardness of the Sign further surfaces in that it is not lexically adaptable to usage or substitution as other parts of speech. In other words, it cannot be used independently as an adjectival noun/pronoun in reference to its object, so that once God is identified as “holy” (A) the Sign could then be used independently within that discourse to refer back to Him.¹⁵ To the hearing reader, this Sign with its conceptual associations appears clear and self-evident. To the Deaf, however, the application of the Sign within Christian discourse is not. It is precisely for these reasons that the Okanagan Deaf community stumbled with this “standard” Sign, finding it to be too abstract a term for their day-to-day religious needs.

In order to fill this gap, the Okanagan Deaf community developed a new Sign for “holy” (B), which begins with the Sign for “glisten/glory” (Figure 2)¹⁶ as its base, executed in both hands according to the pattern of the Sign “become” (Figure 3).¹⁷ The Sign for “glisten/glory” is by its very nature a visual concept. By using this Sign as a building block for “holy” (B), the Okanagan Deaf community was able to re-conceive their concept of “holiness” and present it in visual terms.



Figure 2

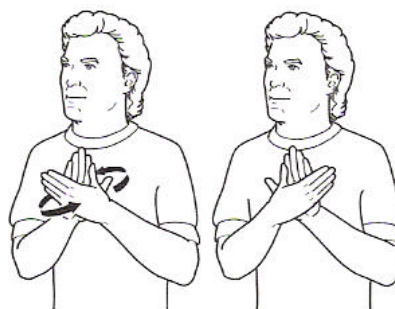


Figure 3

¹⁵ This is a common practice within the structure of ASL discourse. See Hoemann, 85.

¹⁶ Riekehof, 313.

¹⁷ See *Canadian Dictionary*, 45.

Furthermore, this visual conception of “holiness” is pregnant with associations to Biblical imagery. Psalm 104:1-2 speaks of God as clothed in the brightness of His splendour. The Lord’s presence is similarly tied to the image of cloud and brightness in the accounts of Moses’ encounter with Him on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:15-18) as well as the numerous Biblical descriptions of His presence within the Temple (I Kgs 8:10-11; Ezek. 10:3-5; 43:1-5). This imagery is certainly also the backdrop for the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-12; Lk. 9:28-36). Connections could even be argued to the image of God’s presence before Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3). What the new Sign (B) accomplishes is that, within the context of discourse, the concept of “holy” is re-imagined from that of an abstract notion of “purity” to a visually embodied presence giving both the signer and signee a concrete image with which they can relate. Furthermore, because of the notion of presence as attached to the Sign “become” (Figure 3), the new Sign (B) is lexically adaptable and can be used independently as a reference to God as present in His splendour. In this way it avoids the syntactic and semantic rigidity which contributed to the functional awkwardness of the traditional Sign (A).

A further consideration which is worthy of note is that the new Sign (B) gesturally places God within the immediate personal-relational¹⁸ space of both the signer and signee, whereas the usual Sign for God (Figure 4)¹⁹ is normally executed at the upper right boundary of the signer’s personal-relational space. The usual Sign for “God”, originally built on the gesture for “humility” or “humble” and “honour”,²⁰ was intended to capture a subjective devotional quality of the individual as though he were standing in God’s presence. But again, the Sign has its limitations in that it is executed outside the normal relational space of the signer (i.e. not in the immediate line of sight and as a result not in the immediate line of relationship and discourse),



Figure 4

¹⁸ This can be visualized as a bubble or box immediately in front of the individual in which the vast majority of Signs are executed. “Violations of this sign space carry with them specific connotations, e.g., a derogatory *left field* execution or a satirical exaggeration of an execution.” Hoemann, 10-11.

¹⁹ Costello, 81.

²⁰ Costello offers this as an etymological explanation for the Sign for “God”. See Costello, 81. Riekehof, on the other hand, explains it as an initialized Sign beginning with the letter **G** in the right hand and progressing simply to an open palm. See Riekehof, 306. Riekehof does not draw any connections to the Signs for “humble” or “humility” in her description of the Sign. It should be noted that whatever the specific etymology of the Sign, it is neither visually rooted nor obviously iconic.

and that it represents God subjectively in terms of the individual’s pious worship of Him. The simple fact that the new Sign (B) is executed right in the centre of the signer’s personal-relational space as an objective and visual presence changes the entire social and religious dynamic of the discourse. God is no longer “up there” in an inaccessible nether realm shrouded by an image of personal devotion, but is immediately and visually present wrapped in the glory of His splendour. The new Sign (B) serves in effect to concretize the relationship between God and the individual in a way which is organically suited to the language and culture of the Deaf. “Holiness” is moved from the realm of abstract characteristics to that of an embodied presence of God. It is encoded in terms of visual characteristics rather than a conceptually abstract (non-visual) and adjectival term. Restated in other words, the new Sign for “holy” (B) represents a shift within the parameters of ASL of “talking about God” to making Him present (proclamation) through the medium of the Sign (visual Word). By so doing, it opens the door to the Deaf for a direct personal relationship with God (captured linguistically) in a way which was not previously possible within the parameters of ASL.

A further difficulty arises in relation to the standard Sign for “holy” (A) when considered in relationship to gesturally similar Signs. As already mentioned, the standard Sign (A) is one among several which emerge from a grouping of Signs bound together by the same basic gestural movement. Signs within this grouping include those for “clean”, “wash”, “forgive”, “pure”, as well as “holy”. At first glance, there does not seem to be anything problematic with this association. However, other concepts intrude upon a neat Lutheran exposition of the term. “Dismiss” and “dry-up” (as in “empty” and “parched”) also emerge within this gestural family. Closely allied to it is also another family of Signs executed with the same basic motion, only holding the left hand palm-down rather than palm-up. This family includes the Signs for “naked” and “destroy”. It bears asking the question with gestural associations such as these, to what extent the standard Sign for “holy” (A) confuses the attribute of God’s holiness by communicating the idea that God could be “empty” and “dismissive” through derivative semantic associations.²¹ This point is particularly relevant in relation to preaching and catechesis so as not to give a mis-coloured understanding of God’s character among the Deaf. Further study is needed in order to positively determine if this semantic crossover does indeed take place. For the time being, the mere possibility of this confusion warrants both

²¹ For a discussion of semantic fields and associations within spoken languages see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). It is reasonable that this phenomenon could be present in Signed languages as well as spoken ones.

awareness of the concerns of the local Deaf community and appropriate pastoral sensitivity on the part of the Signing preacher.²²

Lest we praise the one and overemphasize the shortcomings of the other, it bears mentioning that the new Sign (B) is similarly open to possible confusion. Remembering that the new Sign (B) was developed within a Reformed Church culture, the question needs to be asked to what extent it reflects a “Theology of Glory” and runs interference with the Scriptural “Spirituality of the Cross”. Does the new Sign (B) tie the presence of God too closely to the visual concept of “glory” rather than recognizing our Lord’s presence for us in the person of Jesus Christ, in His Word, and in the Sacraments? Furthermore, with connections to the Signs for “glory” (Figure 2) and “become” or “change” (Figure 3), the question needs to be asked as to what extent the new Sign, again on the basis of semantic associations within gesturally similar families of Signs, avoids the traditional concept of “holiness” in favour of visual eye-candy to capture the imagination of the signees? Similarly, do semantic associations tied to the notion of “becoming” or “change” as a root gesture within the new Sign (B) challenge the notion of God’s constancy and steadfastness especially as witnessed in the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ? Other semantic associations within the same gestural family of Signs could lead to possible confusion of God’s character relating to the concepts for “exchange”, “transform”, and simply “turn around”. A further question that bears asking is whether the association with the term “glory” automatically predisposes the Deaf community to a theology and spiritual piety of glory rather than focusing the glory of God (and Deaf piety) on Jesus Christ on the cross (I Cor. 1:18-24)? A last consideration that bears investigation is that the new Sign (B) incorporates a visual concept of “holiness” with an image of God’s shrouded presence. This presence is not explicitly incarnate or Trinitarian. It is important to consider to what extent this new Sign opens the Deaf community to Modalist or even Unitarian forms of mysticism rather than Christian orthodoxy. These questions, however, are better answered over time as the Sign (B) is too new at this point to determine exactly how it will be understood and received within the Deaf community as a whole.

One further point bears mentioning. While both share the same translator’s gloss of “holy” and can both be translated as such, as illustrated in the discussion above, they do not share identically the same semantic

²² This point needs to be further studied especially in light of current social issues within the Deaf community where the Deaf are beginning to fight against both perceived and real cases of discrimination and oppression of hearing-impaired individuals in the past. If the standard Sign for “holy” (A) does indeed include a crossover to include semantic associations of “dismissive” or “condescension”, the continuance of using this Sign on the part of the Church could prove to be an unnecessary stumbling block to the work of Gospel proclamation.

space. The ideas communicated by the two Signs overlap, but they also take the signee in two different directions in the breadth of what they communicate. The standard Sign (A) communicates a forensic idea of ‘holiness’ as God being pure and clean—without the stain or spot of sin; the new Sign (B) communicates a visual image of “glory” and “splendour”, but does not in and of itself suggest the image of “purity” as portrayed by Sign (A).²³ The result is that a simple substitution of one Sign for the other will not work straight across the board. This point is important to keep in mind as both signer and interpreter need to carefully weigh the context and concept of what is being communicated and choose which Sign is most appropriate in any given discourse setting. Further, those working with the Deaf need to consider ways of explaining “holiness” (A) in long form—without losing the attention of the signee in linguistically conceptual contradictions or abstractions. Similarly, when using the new Sign (B), care needs to be taken to maintain a clear connection to God’s “holiness” as hidden in the person of Jesus Christ, especially as He reveals it on the cross, so as to avoid the development of a non- or a-sacramental piety among the Deaf, or worse, the formation of a mysticism which flows from an inordinate fetish with the hidden unity of God rather than the revealed Trinity of persons such as happened in the Latin West during the later Middle Ages.

At present, the newness of the Sign makes it difficult to determine how its usage and scope of doctrinal content will develop. Only sustained observation over time will uncover whether or not this Sign will receive wide spread acceptance within the Deaf community of the Okanagan valley and even beyond. What is presently clear is that the introduction of this new Sign (B) grew out of a spiritual desire within the Okanagan Deaf community to frame and express their relationship with God in more concrete terms than had as yet been allowed by the traditional lexicography of ASL. For the moment, this desire appears to have resolved itself with a new spiritual awareness anchored in the introduction of this new Sign (B) into the local vocabulary of the Deaf. The Sign’s introduction also raises a number of pertinent issues for preachers serving among the Deaf relating both to the content and conceptualization of our preaching. It likewise leaves some dangling theological issues which will only be resolved as the evolution of this new Sign (B) and its usage are observed over time.

²³ Elaine Costello, notes that “signs used for religious services and ceremonies are closely aligned with the particular doctrines of the faith represented. One must be very careful in choosing a particular sign or variation for an English gloss. In fact, it may often be better to use a string of signs to explain the sign’s meaning rather than choose one sign, thus assuring that the concept is clearly and conceptually presented.” Costello, xiv.

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THE PLACE OF POLEMICS IN CONFESSING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH¹

Edward G. Kettner

We live in an age of contradictions. In Western culture the use of insult humour abounds, and ridicule, particularly against those seeming to be self-righteous, is understood to be even more than a privilege, perhaps even a right. And when the self-righteous show themselves to have feet of clay, the world rejoices. However, we also live in an age of political correctness, in which those who are perceived to be in a position of powerlessness are to be treated with respect to the extent that their views and “felt needs” are not to be criticized at all, lest they be offended. Since Christianity, or the church, is seen as still being in a position of power (though even in North America it is beginning to be pushed to the margins) it is fair game for ridicule itself, while its suggestions that particular forms of behaviour or belief are perhaps to be questioned, or even rejected, is viewed as being intolerant and unacceptable, and even in some cases efforts are being made to make speech against such things illegal. All views and attitudes are to be rendered acceptable, except “exclusivist” views, namely those that dare to suggest some are wrong.

This can put Christian preaching in a difficult position, especially in the sense that to preach the Gospel is to declare that there is indeed “no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).”² So, certain questions must be asked. Are polemics necessary at all? If so, how may they be used? What do we mean by “polemics” in the first place?

In popular usage, the term “polemics” is sometimes understood as an attack on one’s opponents (reflecting its origin in the Latin term for “war”), and in such a way that the person rather than the argument is the target. And there is no question but that this weapon has been part of the arsenal of theologians down through the ages. Luther was a master at the use of invective against his opponents, both in creative use of distorting the names of his opponents, and in the use of scatological terms to refer to their teachings, *Teufelsdröck* being one of the milder terms! And St Paul himself

¹ This essay was presented to the ILC seminaries conference in Erfurt, Germany, 31 March–4 April 2004.

² Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [Editor’s note: the anglicized version to which the spelling has been conformed is published by HarperCollins. – TMW]

attacked the circumcision party in Galatia with invective, suggesting that those who were so enamoured with circumcision should go the whole route and emasculate themselves!³

But of course the term does not merely refer to the use of insult. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* notes that the term refers to “the art of controversial discussion”, especially in the discipline of theology. The use of invective may at times be a part of this art, but that need not be the case. And in our “politically correct” age, it may in fact be counterproductive. Furthermore, the use of invective can easily lapse into insult simply for the sake of insult, and call more attention to itself than to the truth that we are called upon to defend.

There is indeed a proper place for polemics in the refutation of error, as the Scriptures themselves make abundantly clear. St Paul notes, those who hold the office of public ministry are to be “able to teach” (I Tim. 3:2), which includes the ability “to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Tit. 1:9). The word ἐλέγκω, which is used here by St Paul, carries with it connotations of correcting and convincing with the truth those who are in error, along with expressing strong disapproval for the error. Hence various translations use terms like “refute”, “convince”, and “convict” for the term. All of this demonstrates that rebuke needs to take place in the context of the truth: noting not only that we teach the truth simply for the sake of its being true (something we must do if we are to be faithful witnesses to the word of God), but because the eternal salvation of those being led astray is at risk. That is why, for example, St Paul puts an anathema upon those who would preach a gospel different from the one that he preached (Gal. 1:8-9).

The very fact that the Gospel is truth makes polemics necessary. In order to argue against error, the truth must first be told. The dogmatists of the Lutheran Church have always seen that doing dogmatics involves two distinct activities: the presentation of the truth and the refutation of error. Note, for example, the title of Quenstedt’s dogmatic work: *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum*. He demonstrates this method by first setting forth positive statements, for example, of the very nature of theology, and then follows with a polemical section, which asks questions, sets forth the truth, and then puts forth counterarguments, which he in turn rebuts.⁴ In doing so he follows scholastic methodology, not really different from what Melancthon does in the Apology, as is clearly evident in Apology IV: there the truth of justification is presented, followed by detailed

³ Gal. 5:12.

⁴ A demonstration of this can be seen in English in J. A. Quenstedt, *The Nature and Character of Theology*, abridged, edited, and translated by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986).

refutation of the Roman view. The Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord both clearly set forth what our churches teach, or, in more precise terms, what we “believe, teach, and confess”, followed by a declaration of those teachings which are to be condemned. To hold to a particular article of the faith carries the implication that those views that contradict, or are inconsistent with, that article, are wrong. And in conjunction with the faith which they hold, error carries with it the danger of (a) bearing false witness to the truth that God has revealed;⁵ and (b) blunting at least, and denying, at worst, the very Gospel which is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16).

As Francis Pieper discusses the nature and character of theology in his dogmatics, he also notes the place of polemics as necessary. He cites Titus 1:9, and notes the priority of first confessing the truth, and then going on to refuting the error. So, he declares,

The clear presentation of the true doctrine must come before the refutation of the false doctrine. The hearers will thus be in a position to see that the polemics are *justified* and will be able to make the condemnation of the false doctrine their own. And they will hardly suspect the teachers of being contentious and unjust.⁶

The truth is to be confessed and error is to be condemned. It seems simple, does it not? But in what manner is this to take place? The Scriptures see two different attitudes that are to be cultivated: one when dealing with wayward people of God, and another when dealing with false public teachers of the faith.

When dealing with the people of God, the attitude of gentleness predominates. For example, Peter exhorts the elders to whom he writes, “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight ... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:2-3). Even the people of God, as they stand before a hostile world to confess their faith, are exhorted,

In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.

The example of our Lord, the Servant, is seen in Isaiah, who declares of Him, “a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not

⁵ Thus Paul, when he notes to the Corinthians the implications of the idea that there is no resurrection, namely that then Christ has not been raised, notes that if this is so, “we are even found to be misrepresenting God”, that is, we are false witnesses (I Cor. 15:15).

⁶ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 49.

quench” (Is. 42:3). And there is the example of Stephen, who denounced the Sanhedrin for their participation in the death of Christ, but when faced with death himself because of his confession of Christ, responded with the words, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60).

This spirit of gentleness St Paul declares to be a fruit of the Spirit.⁷ That, however, does not mean being uncertain about the truth, nor does it mean saying that the issues involved in properly confessing the Gospel are insignificant. It is in fact quite the opposite: it is through the use of the truth that people are led away from their error and in fact grow in the truth. The pastor thus serves in a way as a sentry, informing the people under his charge that their city is under attack, and not to be deceived by those who say otherwise, who would convince them that there is no real enemy at all, or even that the one who has their best interests at heart is their real enemy! To change the imagery, the faithful shepherd leads to safety the sheep under his care, and also fights off the enemies, the wolves and “roaring lions”, that the sheep might be kept safe. And in order for that to happen, the enemy has to be pointed out. Our Lord Himself warned, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Mt. 7:15). False prophets need to be pointed out as such, not merely in order to justify the true prophet, but because the false prophet is dangerous to the life of the child of God and to the life of the Church. Failure to point out false teaching for the sake of being “nice” or “accepting” is to fail to do one’s God appointed task.

If the weak Christian must be dealt with gently, the false teacher must be dealt with severely, for the sake of the weak Christian. The false teacher, in the end, should know better. He should indeed be corrected, and gentleness is proper when first confronting one who may be inadvertently teaching falsely (as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos [Acts 18:26]); but for the stubborn false teacher sterner measures must be taken for the sake of those who might be led astray, in order that the people might be brought back to safety with the true Gospel. Jesus does warn of the severe punishment which will come upon those who cause one of His “little ones” to stumble. And Jesus Himself in His dealings with the Pharisees was forced to deal with them harshly, even though they were to be obeyed when correct, as they sat in Moses’ seat.

It is in dealing with false teachers that Luther, Pieper, and others in our tradition speak strongly. Pieper quotes Walther, and in doing so notes that a pastor who does not warn against error is in fact an unfaithful pastor. Walther notes:

⁷ Gal. 5:23.

A man may proclaim the pure doctrine, but if he does not condemn and refute the opposing false doctrine, does not warn against the wolves in sheep's clothing, the false prophets, and unmask them, he is not a faithful steward of God's mysteries, not a faithful shepherd of the sheep entrusted to him, not a faithful watchman on the walls of Zion, but, as the Word of God says, an unfaithful servant, a dumb dog, a traitor. The terrible consequences of the minister's failure to use the *elenchus* are before our eyes—many souls lost and the Church deeply hurt. Polemics are absolutely needed.⁸

But there is yet another issue that needs to be dealt with. We have been talking about polemics in terms of the refutation of error, which without question must be done. However, we live in a time in which the very possibility of knowing truth, at least in the religious sphere, is being questioned. Gene Edward Veith notes the implications of this:

Before, in both the modern and the premodern eras, religion involved beliefs about what is real. There either is a God, or there is not. Jesus was either the incarnate Son of God, or He was just a man. Miracles happened, or they did not Today religion is not seen as a set of beliefs about what is real and what is not. Rather, religion is seen as a preference, a choice. We believe in what we like. We believe in what we want to believe.

Where there are no absolute truths, the intellect gives over to the will. Aesthetic criteria replace rational criteria.⁹

This is where the polemical problem stands today. It is not just a matter of refuting error, since the prevailing culture will not admit that there is error to refute. If that is so, then people perceive that it is not ideas that are being attacked, but rather the person who holds those ideas. If truth is thoroughly subjective, then to attack one's ideas is perceived to be at the very least bad manners, since all ideas are understood to have a level playing field (with the exception, of course, of those ideas which claim to be objectively true, and thereby exclude all others).

Again, this is the way that the post-modern (or, today, the post- post-modern culture) operates. Truth is subjective, but that does not put truth on a plane of discovery. Rather, one's truth claims are seen simply as a means to gain power over other human beings, and all ideas, particularly religious ones, are deconstructed on that basis. To say, for example, that homosexuality is wrong is no longer a matter of debate regarding certain facts concerning the nature of human sexuality and its proper use, both in terms of natural law and divine law, but rather an issue about power, both in terms of disempowering the oppressors (those who claim that it goes against

⁸ Pieper, 50.

⁹ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 193.

natural and divine law) and empowering the oppressed (those who declare that truth is subjective: if it is in harmony with the “personhood” of the individual, then it is *ipso facto* proper for that individual). Instead of arguing issues on their merits, all issues are relegated to *ad hominem* arguments. As others have noted, where once we operated with a concept of equality of persons and a hierarchy of ideas (some ideas were in fact more worthy of consideration than others), the contemporary culture operates with a hierarchy of persons and equality of ideas (all ideas are equally worthy, and those that do not agree with this, namely those who claim there is error as well as truth, are not only wrong, they are inferior human beings).

The paradox lies in the fact that the question of truth as subjective and language as an exercise of power carries with it the implication that there is in fact an objective truth, which is that we cannot know anything objectively. Yet those who hold that view in fact recognize that there are activities and ideas that are not right, that there are worldviews that, one might say, are pathological. But again, the focus on the creation of these views is not on sin, evil, or the demonic, but on the result of oppression. Hence the U.S. is actually to blame for the World Trade Center event because of its oppressive economic policies as it relates to the rest of the world, rather than a pathological worldview that encourages suicide and murder with the hope of divine reward.

As the post-modern view has infiltrated theology, and truth and will are replaced by aesthetics, what becomes important is not what is true, but what creates the experience sought by the worshipper. The sacraments, for example, do not have any objective meaning, but the doing of the event gives meaning to the individuals engaged in the experience. This became clear to me at a presentation by Roman Catholic theologian Kenan Osborne, who spoke of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper specifically in terms of the perceptions of the recipients. When, during the question period, I asked whether meaning and efficacy might depend on the truth that God is doing something here, and that people’s ascription of meaning might in fact be an act of self-deception, he seemed not even able to understand the question. For him, truth was simply a matter of perception, and it is the perceiver that creates the meaning. If a churchly activity creates positive meaning, then the activity is beneficial.

Dialogue with the culture, then, demands that individuals steeped in the post-modern mindset be faced with the consequences of its own worldview, and be led back to deal with questions concerning truth claims. For those who are falling prey to false teachings, even as they lay claim to their Saviour, discussion of issues on the basis of the Scriptures themselves may be helpful. Veith suggests that Church Growth advocates may have a point when they note that arguing abstract ideas with the post-modern society may not work, but that people can be led back to the truth through parables and

story (illustrating, perhaps, the consequences of false belief and sinful action), and in facilitating the formation of proper relationships with faithful people of God, utilizing the Church as the Body of Christ in its proper sense.¹⁰ At the same time, he rightly warns against any temptation to make the church more popular with society through caving in to the culture. He notes, “Making disciples requires moral, intellectual, and spiritual *discipline*, certainly alien to human nature, especially today. But to think that people today are incapable of understanding Christian truth or of having their minds transformed is to underestimate the Holy Spirit and the power of God.”¹¹

J. Michael Reu, writing early in the twentieth century, notes both the place of and limits to the use of polemics in Lutheran preaching, noting that the Gospel must have the final word. He states:

The Church cannot live by negations, however great a necessity “sound doctrine” may be. Least of all dare she foster in her midst a censorious and judging temper. The clear and positive presentation of the truth must be the rule, and this will accomplish more than all polemics or apologetics. Where it becomes a duty to oppose an erroneous position, this should not be done with a view to condemning those who hold that position or of pillorying them as disobedient to God’s Word and enemies of the truth,—in short, not with a view to diverting attention from the matter under discussion to the representatives of opposing views,—but in order, by way of contrast, to bring the congregation to a fuller apprehension of the truth itself.¹²

Reu also notes the danger of presenting the Lutheran position in a supercilious, triumphalistic manner, for this will distract from the truth of the Gospel and draw undue attention to the presenter or preacher. He says:

[T]he habit of constantly alluding to Luther and the fondness for boasting of the mighty past, the splendid present and the still more glorious future of the Lutheran Church, so prevalent in certain quarters, are by no means themselves the hallmarks of a genuinely Lutheran sermon. They conduce to a smug superficiality, rather than to that true inwardness that must go hand in hand with a soundly confessional sermon and life.¹³

J. A. O. Preus III three quarters of a century later echoes the same theme, as he notes the dangers of both a-confessional and hyper-confessional attitudes: the former abandoning confessional theology for the sake of a lowest-common-denominator theology that in the end says nothing, and the latter engaging in an unthinking, uncritical attack on perceived opponents in the name of the Confessions. Preus notes:

¹⁰ Veith, 226-27. Emphasis original.

¹¹ Veith, 228.

¹² M. Reu, *Homiletics*, ([n.p.]: Wartburg Publishing House, 1924; reprint ed. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 73.

¹³ Reu, 73.

Ironically, the “a-confessionalist” and “hyperconfessionalist” positions share one thing in common: Neither engages in an in-depth exegetical, historical, and theological study of the confessions. Neither consistently uses the confessions as guides for solving the challenges facing the church today. Obviously, both of these extremes must be avoided.¹⁴

The polemical nature of rational argument in the end is an exercise in the Law, and the Law does not convert. The Law uncovers sin, and may either drive one to hardness of heart or to despair. It is only the Gospel message itself that brings the deadened heart to life and moves one to leave error behind and to embrace the truth. This means that the final word must again be not merely the condemnation of error, but a reassertion of the truth, the glorious message of the Gospel. Argument does have its place, but in the end only proclamation and confession will move hearts. For the power of God to salvation is not our own eloquent words or the power of our rational arguments, but the proclamation of the cross of Christ. As St Paul said to the Corinthians, so should we say to those to whom we are sent: “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:1-2).

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¹⁴ J. A. O. Preus III, “Sources of Lutheran Dogmatics: Addressing Contemporary Issues with the Historic Christian Faith”, in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 31-32.

RECOGNIZING AND ENCOURAGING THE GIFTS FOR THE PASTORAL VOCATION¹

Wilbert Kreiss

The Dogmaticians of Lutheran Orthodoxy, followed by a theologian like Fr. Pieper, distinguished between theology in the subjective and theology in the objective sense of the term. They defined theology in the subjective sense of the term as the capacity to carry on the Christ-instituted ministry of Word and Sacraments. They called it the “*habitus spiritualis, supernaturalis, theosdotos*”. It is a supernatural capacity offered by God. It comprises natural gifts and talents like intelligence, the fitness to follow a solid programme of theological studies ranging at a university level, the ability to speak in public, sociability, the capacity to establish a sound relationship with other people, but all this sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This “*habitus spiritualis*” involves, of course, the faith and its fruits and all that is needed to proclaim the Word of God, to teach, edify, admonish, correct, comfort, administer the sacraments, and take care of the entrusted souls. In a word, it is the conjunction of all that enables a man to be an efficient and faithful servant of the Lord and His church.

The apostle Paul provides us in his pastoral epistles with a list of these aptitudes². Most of them deal with Christian ethics (sociability, hospitality, gentleness, goodness, humility, temperateness, being blameless and dedicated to his ministry), but the apostle insists also on the teaching capacity (I Tim. 3:2, διδακτικός), on being able to admonish according to sound teaching (Tit. 1:9, the bishop or pastor should be δυνατός ... παρακαλεῖν ... καὶ ... ἐλέγχειν). It’s the ability or fitness to the ministry that St Paul describes as follows:

¹ This essay was presented to the ILC seminaries conference in Erfurt, Germany, 31 March–4 April 2004.

² I Tim. 3:1-7 : “This is a statement we can trust: If anyone sets his heart on being a pastor, he desires to do a noble work. Now, a pastor must be blameless, the husband of one wife, not drinking too much wine, a man of good judgment and fine behaviour, kind to guests, able to teach, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not one who loves money. He must manage his own family well and have his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a new convert, in order that he will not become proud and fall into the judgment of the devil. The people outside the church must speak well of him, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil’s snare.” See also Titus 1:5-16. Similar qualities are required from the deacons in I Tim. 3:8-13. N.B. All NT quotations in this essay are from GWN, *The New Testament: God’s Word to the Nations*.

It is not that we can produce anything by ourselves and claim that the ability to do it was our own, but God gives us our ability [ἡ ἰκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ]. He has made us able ministers [ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους] of a new “last will and statement,” not of letter but of spirit, because the letter brings death, but the spirit brings life. (II Cor 3:5,6)

Lutheran theology distinguishes between the “*vocatio interna*” and the “*vocatio externa*”. The “*vocatio externa*” alone entrusts somebody with the ministry of Word and Sacraments. It’s the call that Christ Himself, through the instrumentality of His church, issues to a man to establish him as His minister and ambassador, the *rite vocatus*” of the Augsburg Confession.³ This outward call alone puts somebody into the divine ministry. But before it is issued, there needs to be an inward or subjective call. To engage into theological studies that will lead to the ministry, a man needs to feel internally called to that. He must have the desire, the sincere wish to become a pastor or a missionary. This longing or inclination can be experienced during early childhood. I personally wanted to become a pastor when I was 3 years old. That’s what my parents used to tell me (although it happened at the same time that I refused once or twice to say the family table prayer!). Maybe I just wanted to imitate my dad. This desire may also arise later, during adolescence, or even much later, when somebody has already acquired some professional training and worked in a secular job. It may ripen slowly, grow from year to year, or on the contrary rise suddenly. Maybe after having heard a mighty sermon on the church and her mission, or after a missionary coming from far abroad spoke at a mission festival, or after some personal strong and particularly intense experience. It may also happen that a given person is not conscious of any desire to become a pastor, but he has the natural gifts and the qualifications granted by the Holy Spirit that would make out of him quite a competent preacher and pastor.

It may happen here and there that pastors are at the wrong place in the ministry, even if they have completed brilliant studies and graduated with the warmest congratulations of the faculty. They lack one or several essential capacities, a situation that should have prevented the church from ordaining them to the holy ministry. It could be that our churches overestimate the ministry’s mental and intellectual aspect, its knowledge dimension, the level of theological studies and seminary training, to the prejudice of the spiritual capacities, arguing a bit like this: if the exams have been successfully passed and the pastor who was responsible for the vicar has not called attention to some disastrous deficiency, the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

This situation, thanks be to God, did probably not happen all too often in our confessional Lutheran churches who have, by the way, quite a high idea

³ AC XIV.

of the pastoral ministry and its obligations. The reverse was probably much more common in our churches' history: gifts slept here and there and were not put into the service of God's Kingdom. Young people had the required qualifications and could have become good pastors, but they were not able to make the step and didn't decide to enter the ministry. There may be many reasons for that: the desire to have some specific job in the world while at the same time serving the Lord as a layman with the gifts one has received from Him and being living and active members of His church; or the cost of college and seminary training. Sometimes also, as is presently the case in our church, the obligation to acquire, besides the theological training, some professional skill to be able to get a decent salary from the world and thus to provide for one's family needs. Allow me also to mention the bad image of the ministry that some people may have: pastors always criticized and censured for many different and sometimes contradicting reasons, the "hire and fire" attitude, the lack of consideration, esteem and gratitude, the huge investment in strength and time that the church commonly expects from her pastors, the broad identity crisis that the ministry is going through in a deeply secularized society at a time when the churches get more and more empty and potential pastors may feel that the pastoral ministry and what it has to offer is no longer recognized by many people as essential or even helpful to their well-being.

But it's also quite certain that many people in our churches could have become excellent pastors or missionaries if they had not doubted their capacities, and that the church didn't do much to help them overcome their doubts. So they took other advice, decided for some other job less demanding in terms of work, gifts, talents, and responsibilities. Some chose not to become pastors after a time of doubt and struggle, when they felt quite alone and had nobody to advise, counsel, and encourage them. Still others decided they were not the right men for the ministry, because they did not see the gifts that were sleeping in them, gifts that asked for nothing better than to wake up, grow, and ripen. And nobody told them: "Hi, do you know that the Lord has granted you some undeniable gifts (for example a good knowledge of Holy Scripture, a living and shining faith, the gift to share your convictions with others, the love of the Lord and His church), many things that you could put into His service as a pastor?"

There has been in the history of our church in France, and this certainly holds true for all our churches, men who decided alone, with joy and assurance, to enter the pastoral ministry. Others may have taken the same decision because they wanted to please their parents or to walk in their father's footsteps and to hold the same divine ministry as their dad. It certainly happened also that a given young man decided to become a minister of Word and Sacraments because, when he was a teenager, he was lucky to have a pastor who encouraged him to take the decision. But these

cases were probably not all too frequent and so the church probably deprived herself of quite a lot of men who could have been good pastors, because she did nothing to awaken in their heart the appeal for the ministry, because these young men (or older men, when thinking about a second career ministry) met nobody on their way who helped them take the decision. Here is obviously a deficiency that should be recognized, that we need to face and cure.

Rather than just answering the question: “How can we recognize and encourage the gifts for the pastoral vocation?”, I will attempt to face a broader one: “What can our churches do in order to encourage men to enter the pastoral ministry?” I will not only deal with the problem of recognizing and encouraging the necessary gifts, but try to think about what the church might do to awake the internal call to the ministry.

It’s the holy duty of the Christian church to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that people may know about the salvation that God has prepared in Christ and has in store for them. She must also teach the Word of God (Law and Gospel) in order to strengthen God’s people in faith and piety. That’s exactly the reason why Christ has given her apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, “to prepare saints for service as workers in building up the body of Christ, until all of us become one in our faith and in our knowledge of God’s Son, until we become mature, until we reach the full height of Christ” (Eph. 4:12.13). It is the Lord’s will to build up His church through men whom He calls Himself to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. It’s a truth that the Christian church has to teach: she needs pastors if she wants to survive, live, and grow. There are therefore a couple of things she has to perform to achieve this goal.

I

In order to raise vocations, calls for the ministry, she must show, display and emphasize its beauty. To be a pastor is surely a difficult job, everywhere in the world, in both hemispheres and wherever men are living. And in some regions, in some political or cultural environments it is even much more difficult than in others. The ministry demands a high investment in time, strength, and responsibilities, where always looking at one’s clock is surely not the appropriate attitude. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries, seminary professors, church officials are in their daily life directly responsible before God for what they do and the way they do it. As St Paul writes:

Let a person think of us as servants of Christ and managers of God’s mysteries. Now then, it is demanded of any manager that he be found trustworthy. It means very little to me that you or any human court should examine me. I do not even examine myself. I have a clear conscience, but this does not justify me. It is the Lord who examines me. (I Cor. 4 :1-4)

It's a difficult, and yet a beautiful job. Doing this job means participating in some way with Christ in the rescue of the world, proclaiming the message of salvation, the only message that can indeed save the world. Many jobs in this world contribute to the temporal well-being of people, their wealth, their health, their security. But the ministry entrusted by Christ bears eternal fruits. Its goal is setting men free of the curse that lies on them because of their sins and the eternal condemnation that awaits them, and offering them God's grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. This certainty provides the pastors amidst their daily difficulties and frustrations an incomparable joy and bliss, the beautiful lot of those who "co-operate" with Christ in the salvation of mankind. This certainty needs to be constantly proclaimed. The words of the prophet are still true today: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says unto Zion: Your God reigns" (Is. 52:7).

2

The Christian church should secondly do everything to give a good image of the ministry—which is probably not always the case. For a long time, Western society put priests and pastors on a pedestal. They were recognized and highly respected personalities, VIPs. It was the era of the "*Herr Pfarrer*". This time has gone by in western Europe and may be going by in today's North America, but is still prevailing, at least to a certain degree, in Africa and maybe other parts of the world. At the opposite end, you have the concept that sees in the local church, in the congregation, the pastor's employer or boss, who "hires" his employee and sometimes "fires" him if he doesn't like him anymore, or if the pastor doesn't anymore fit his expectations, which is certainly contrary to the will of the church's Lord and to the essence of the divinely instituted ministry. The first attitude tends to turn the pastor into a little lord, whereas he has been called to be the Lord's and His church's servant.⁴ The second attitude assimilates him to somebody who looks for a job and fails to recognize the divine origin and authority of the ministry.⁵

Quite often people keep a kind of watch on the pastor and look at him in a way that is much more critical than kind, and the criticisms that run through the church and sometimes come to his ears are loaded with bitterness. People all too often act as their pastor's faultfinders. This does not mean that the pastor should be above criticism. It's indeed the church's duty

⁴ Mt. 10:24, 25; 20:25-28; 23 :11.

⁵ I Tim. 4 :12 ; Tit. 2 :15.

to be vigilant and she absolutely has the right to criticize her pastors when they become negligent and careless as they carry on their ministry. But a church may also display the kind of attitude that is constantly on the lookout for weaknesses and deficiencies and expresses criticisms that do not always sincerely intend to help the pastor, but are inspired by a fleshly spirit that is not becoming for the church of Christ and lacks the esteem, confidence, and love that Christians owe their God-given shepherds, and that pastors deserve when they do their best to sincerely and faithfully carry on their ministry.

Therefore everything should be done to mobilize the church around her pastors. It's a matter of teaching. It's also a matter of attitude. Everything needs to be done to establish and promote a good relationship between the pastors and their congregations, because much is at stake: if the church loves the pastors God has given her because they are dedicated men and faithful to the mission they have been entrusted, she helps through her very attitude to raise vocations. If she does the contrary, she will discourage and deter people who will opt for another job.

3

It's the church's duty, as far as her financial resources allow it, to provide for the needs of her pastors and to offer them a decent salary, so that the candidates for the ministry don't have to worry too much about their and their family's future. Two extremes must absolutely be avoided: nothing should be done that would assimilate the pastoral office to a social position people could long for, to an enviable status or rank involving a generous income, all things that would move people to choose the ministry for carnal and not spiritual reasons. On the other hand, the church should not allow her pastors and candidates for the ministry to live in constant fear and concern about the next day. Nobody should decide to become a pastor because there is some prestige and a good salary connected with the ministry, and nobody should decide not to become a pastor because the ministry generates too much frustration and renouncing.

When I think about my church, this is certainly one of the reasons, and maybe the most important one, why for the last decade not a single young man decided to enrol for a theological training and to prepare thus for the ministry. We have been for a long time subsidized by the Missouri Synod—not that we might simply face our current expenses, but to help us reach out and start new churches. And we are indeed very thankful for that. This time is over and this means that the young churches that grew out of our mission effort are not in a position to manage financially, and especially to pay their pastors (the pastor's salary, including the many social charges and taxes, represents roughly 2/3 of a congregation's budget). So either those of our congregations that are self-supporting (and none of them has more than 100 baptized members!) have to support our mission churches (and that's what

we do, in spite of the sacrifices involved), or the pastors have to look for a secular job (at least part-time) and carry on their ministry on a benevolent basis. It's easy to imagine that these people are overloaded. Try to imagine what it means when, coming back from your work at 6 or 7pm and sometimes even later), you have to think about your Sunday morning sermon, or try to find time for a burial, take care of the catechism instruction in your church, lead Bible studies, visit the sick, make house calls, or try to do some outreach work.⁶ To this you need to add following consideration: in order to have any chance to find a job in the present social context (12% unemployment), you need to have an adequate training and professional skills. So, once you have graduated from high school, you need to study theology and prepare for the ministry for 4 or 5 years, and then to get some other training for a secular job that will also last 4 or 5 years. That amounts to approximately 10 years before you start having a personal income and founding a family.⁷ All these things put together are a very serious obstacle for a church that is concerned about relieving her pastors and, in addition to that, would like to have some outreach and to do mission work. It's a very big problem to which, up to this time, we have not found the adequate solution. We will be thankful to anybody who could help us with some good advice.

4

To raise interest for the ministry and encourage young people as well as adults who have already a professional qualification and a job to decide for the pastoral ministry—and this brings us back to the assigned theme—, we have to emphasize and underscore in our public teaching and the pastoral work we are doing with our youngsters, that God always grants His children the gifts they need and that He can also strengthen and develop existing gifts. Moses and Jeremiah were called by Him to His service although they had no “*vocatio interna*”, no inward call, no wish to become prophets. In the case of Jonah, He even obligated somebody to be His prophet, because He wanted to use this man and not another one to call the people of Nineveh to repentance and faith. God alone can act this way, because He alone never makes a mistake in His decisions and choices, and He alone can grant His people the gifts they need to speak on His behalf. St Augustine said to God: “*Da quod jubes et jube quod vis*”, “give what You prescribe and prescribe

⁶ We tried, of course, to train people for assisting ministries (deacons, catechists, etc.), but although having pastor's assistants may be quite helpful, it's far from solving all the problems related to the described situation.

⁷ By the way, it is, because of our social system, quite difficult in France for students to find a job and earn some money.

what You want". He always showers His gifts on those He calls to His service.

Moses questioned his ability to face Pharaoh and to speak in public, but the Lord told him: "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Ex. 4:11, 12). The young and shy Jeremiah didn't dare to encounter powerful kings and hostile crowds, but God promised him: "Say not: I am a child, for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatsoever I shall command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord" (Jer. 1:7, 8). And Paul writes to Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have which was given to you by prophecy [τοῦ ἐν σοὶ χαρίσματος, ὃ ἐδόθη σοι] when the pastors laid their hands on you" (I Tim. 4:14). "I remind you to fan into a flame the gift of God [τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ] which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (II Tim. 1:6). When God issues an order, He also grants the required and adequate gift, and what He did in the past, He is still able to perform today. This truth must be loudly and strongly proclaimed as the church teaches God's Word. It's also a truth that she must be able to put into the hearts of those who have questions and doubts, who would like to be ministers of God's Word and Sacraments, but do not dare to make the step and go into this direction, because they are aware of their lacunas, deficiencies, and weaknesses.

God who provides His servants with the gifts they need to serve Him, knows also how to develop them and to cause them to flower. He will certainly not fail to do it for those who fervently ask. The church must be able to tell those who question the reality and sufficiency of their gifts, who doubt and hesitate, that God hears them too and answers their prayers, when they ask Him to give them more confidence and assurance, more tact and wisdom, more ability to listen to others, to comfort and admonish them.

It is good to remind God's people that the gifts are not all innate. Some may be acquired or developed through an appropriate self-discipline, perseverance, and hard-working, sometimes through specific techniques or therapies. That holds true, for instance, with what Christ and the apostles call "παρρησία", that's the courage, openness, ability to speak in public, the assurance that overcomes timidity and shyness, etc. Without forgetting the prayer that helps defeat many obstacles.

5

The church should also organize a regular strategy of sensitization. She should on a regular basis remind God's people that they need pastors and missionaries to fulfil the mission they have been entrusted by God. "How can they call on Him if they have not believed in Him? How can they believe in Him if they have not heard of Him? How can they hear if no one

preaches ?” (Rom. 10:14). The church should also recall to mind that the pastoral ministry remains the most beautiful job. This should be preached in the pulpits. It’s also a truth that the boards of elders in our churches and more specifically our youth organizations and the pastors that are particularly responsible for working with our teenagers should state in mission festivals, youth-gatherings, retreats, summer camps, and ski camps, youth periodicals, etc. I think also of seminary open days where competent people could explain what a theological training is, what it involves, what it means being trained for the pastoral ministry. A specialist of practical theology could also show on such an occasion the different aspects of the pastoral office, the gifts and charisms required to hold it, the blessings it bestows, and the joy it affords. And, finally, youngsters could on such an open day meet seminary students who would concretely tell them about daily life on the campus and its activities.

One could also imagine special actions like that of the Lutheran Church–Canada, if my information is correct. The goal is to identify in each congregation one or two young men who are considered able to become pastors, and to give their names and addresses to the district or synodical officials of the church or to the seminary faculty. Such an action would allow them to realize that their church regards them as fit for the ministry, and maybe to overcome personal doubts and hesitations. And as far as church officials are concerned, it would enable them to get into touch with these young people and to start a dialog that could raise in their hearts an internal call, a desire to become pastors, or strengthen that call.

The conclusion seems obvious: it is the holy duty of the Christian church who thinks of her present mission and of her future to undertake whatever is possible and to use all available avenues and methods, that through her teaching, the example she gives, the relationship that Christians have with their pastors, and a permanent dialogue with her young members everything be done to recognize and encourage the gifts through which one may, with God’s help, become a faithful, dedicated, and efficient servant of the Lord and His church.

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EVALUATING PASTORAL SUITABILITY¹

John R. Stephenson

As Christ our Lord called the Twelve into His service (Mt. 10:1 *et parr.*), He invested them with an office and named them “apostles” (Lk. 6:13c). At the climax of the second Exodus (cf. Lk. 9:31), He laid specific mandates on them. Until His visible return they and their successors in office should accordingly perform the following tasks in His name as they (1) teach and preach (Mt. 28:20), (2) baptize (Mt. 28:19), (3) absolve and retain sins (Jn 20:22f.), (4) celebrate the Holy Eucharist (I Cor. 11:24f.), and (5) govern His flock (Lk. 22:28-30). On his first missionary journey, Paul and his colleague Barnabas ordained presbyters in the fledgling churches to continue the dominically instituted ministry that the apostles had begun among them (Acts 14:23). So Melancthon in the Treatise noted how the original apostolate flowed into the presbyteral-episcopal office known in Lutheran parlance as the pastorate (Tr 31 & 60-61; cf. esp. the German text of Tr 10: “*haben wir ein gewisse Lehre, daß das Predigtamt vom gemeinen Beruf der Apostel herkommet* [we have a certain doctrine, that the preaching office derives from the common call of the apostles]”). Since we seminary professors are entrusted with responsibility to train future holders of this one office, hardly a day goes by in our lives when we do not somehow face the quite concrete task of “evaluating pastoral suitability”, which self-evidently belongs as a topic on the agenda of this conference. For Paul’s warning to Timothy still resounds in the present tense even as its author and first recipient rest on the other side of the altar: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (I Tim. 5:22). After all, “we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1b).

“Evaluating pastoral suitability” is a process that should precede admission to seminary, continue throughout a seminarian’s period of studies, and follow his placement in office. Moreover, since the Lutheran tradition from Chemnitz in his *Enchiridion* through Walther in his *Kirche und Amt* holds that the Lord calls into office through the active consent of both clergy and laity, we rightly seek the input of reputable layfolk between the time of a student’s admission to our pastoral ministry programmes and his certification for ministry. For several hundred years following Timothy and Titus, headship of the ministerium and teaching office subsisted in one man such as Ignatius, Polycarp, or Irenaeus. With the advent of scholasticism, though, bishops and theologians became distinct breeds. What God joined

¹ This essay was presented to the ILC seminaries conference in Erfurt, Germany, 31 March–4 April 2004.

together historical forces rent asunder, with oft-unhappy effects. We seminary professors, then, are to “evaluate pastoral suitability” in tandem with both fellow officeholders who exercise ἐπισκοπή over us and with such laypeople as, to speak the language of seventeenth-century orthodoxy, may fitly act within the *ecclesia repraesentativa*. Monitoring ongoing “pastoral suitability” after ordination is, of course, the specific responsibility of our bishops/presidents and hence not our direct concern.

The task of a seminary professor is largely, but not exclusively academic. For we wield academic tools not in pursuit of intellectual excellence as such but in the service of purity of doctrine and practice. When the venerable Kurt Marquart preached at my installation at Concordia, St. Catharines, he took as his text II Tim 2:2, “what you have heard from me entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (RSV). I shall not forget how Dr Marquart quoted a theologian of the old Missouri Synod who paraphrased this verse as an admonition from Paul to Timothy to “do the work of a seminary professor”. Our prime calling as (we trust) competent teachers is, then, to raise up further generations of competent teachers for the benefit of the whole flock of Christ.

Focusing on an infelicity in the RSV translation of Titus 1:9 might help us to pinpoint more closely what is involved in the formation of apt teachers in the sense of the Pastoral Epistles. RSV understands κατὰ τὴν διδασχὴν verbally rather than substantivally, offering the rendering that the presbyter-bishop “must hold to the sure word **as taught**, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it” (Tit. 1:9). Yet in Pauline usage διδασχὴ is not simply what happens to be taught in this or that place but already bears the full freight of what the Fathers called the “rule of faith”, that *sine qua non* of the life of the Church known among Lutherans as “confession”. In the early Gnostics the apostle encountered gifted teachers blest (or cursed) with great ingenuity. What he desired was the formation of competent teachers firmly rooted in the apostolic διδασχὴ, men schooled in the right *regula fidei*, that is, shepherds who are orthodox in confession.

Since Concordia, St. Catharines, is an affiliated college of a large secular university, we distinguish sharply between registration for our two master’s degrees and admission to our pastoral ministry programme. A man or a woman of another confession may earn high marks that show up on the transcript issued under the auspices of Brock University, but passing academic performance does not automatically entitle such a student to certification for ministry in Lutheran Church–Canada. This last step before ordination presupposes the successful outcome of a final “Theological Interview”, which is the pale lingering ghost of a procedure compactly set

forth in two and a half pages of Walther's classic *Amerikanisch-lutherische Pastoraltheologie*.² According to Walther in the eighth thesis of his *Pastorale*, any Lutheran church body would be guilty of acting schismatically should it choose to dispense with either the *Examen* or the ordination of pastoral candidates.³ Since Walther's position on the *Examen* was shared with Grabau and Löhe, we do well to sit up and ask ourselves whether we should beef up the procedures in place in our several seminaries. For we must one day render account for our stewardship of office before the judgement seat of Christ.

Basing himself foursquare on the Pastoral Epistles and arming himself with copious quotations from three Lutheran Fathers, Walther insisted that an entity outside the calling congregation thoroughly examine candidates on their knowledge of Scripture and confession with a view to their imminent administration of the pastoral office. This task, which properly pertains to the head of the ministerium, is delegated, in North America at least, to seminary faculties. With fifteen years' experience under my belt, I acknowledge as I read these pages that Walther held the bar considerably higher than most of us do today. As he took aim at the "licensing system" practised in the General Synod following Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Walther fired a direct shot at the "lay ministry" scheme enacted by the Missouri Synod's Wichita Convention in 1989.⁴ Moreover, as he quoted the Danish bishop Jesper Brochmand to the effect that it is wrong to ordain first and train later,⁵ Walther placed a strong question mark, to say the least, against my own recommendation to the last convention of Lutheran Church–Canada that we should adopt and adapt the Lutheran Church of Australia's "pastors with alternate training" (PAT) programme for our own purposes.

Yet one wonders to what extent old Missouri not only talked the talk but also walked the walk with respect to the desired and needful *Examen*. Graduates of the practical seminary at Springfield were not expected to attain the erudition required of their brethren at St. Louis. The fateful gap between ought and is likely goes back as far as Paul, Timothy, and Titus, and readers of Frederik van der Meer's *Augustine the Bishop* will recall that the suffragan bishops in the country regions around Hippo fell dramatically far short of Augustine's theological acumen. As we in Lutheran Church–Canada envisage the formation of "pastors with alternate training", we uphold the biblical-dominical integrity of AC V & XIV as we prepare for an uphill

² C. F. W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), 62-64.

³ Walther, 62.

⁴ Walther, 64.

⁵ Walther, 64.

struggle against the tendency to reduce the old *Examen* to a shadow of what Walther envisaged.

One could more cheerfully consent to the certification of academically challenged candidates and to the formation of “pastors with alternate training” if our clergy all celebrated a uniform Divine Service and if they all followed the same pattern of catechesis, which in North America at least is absolutely not the case. The chaotic conditions on the ground in fact demand more competent candidates with more exhaustive training. But in the second century the Holy Spirit preserved orthodox Christendom amidst the Gnostic crisis despite the absence of institutions of higher learning. As we struggle to maintain our seminaries in a context eerily similar to that of the second century, Walther’s testimony that the *Examen* of candidates also has an extra-academic focus⁶ enables me to move to a second dimension involved in “evaluating pastoral suitability”.

Picking up the thread of I Timothy 3:1-7, Walther and his authorities would have the *Examen* enquire into a candidate’s life in Christ as an indicator of his fitness for ministry. Since the office is one of spiritual fatherhood, even the most spiritually and intellectually gifted women are ineligible to hold it. In our reaction against **Pietism**, we must never forget that Holy Scripture and all orthodox Fathers unanimously inculcate **piety** for all members of the mystical body in general and for their shepherds in particular. Our application of I Timothy 3:1-7 would be rendered easier if we knew how this passage was dealt with in the casuistry section of first and second century *Winkel* conferences. But orthodox, theologically trained women have pointed out to me and others the inconsistency of sticking to the simple sense of the prohibition of women’s ordination in I Timothy 2:12 while doing the dance of the seven veils concerning the sense of “husband of one wife” five verses later in I Timothy 3:2. Our actual practice in this sensitive matter militates against the christological foundation of the office, for our Lord Himself has but one bride.

In his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Kurt Marquart, Harold Senkbeil has called for our traditional academic emphasis to be complemented by an at least equal stress on the spiritual formation of pastoral candidates. John Kleinig has often pointed out to me how he has observed academically gifted graduates struggle in ministry to the point of laying down the office, while some of those who straggled academically go on to flourish in the pastorate in virtue of a deep spirituality manifested in their being men of prayer. So the Lutheran John Arndt and the Roman Catholic Jean Vianney barely scraped through their studies to become exemplary pastors of their respective communions.

⁶ See the third point quoted from Ludwig Hartmann. Walther, 63.

Senkbeil's musings on the spiritual formation of future pastors proceed from the premise that those who act as so to say the instrumental cause of the means of grace should themselves be regularly and piously on the receiving end of word, absolution, and supper. Senkbeil zeroes in on another aspect of the Lutheran tradition where Walther and Löhe were in deepest agreement. How can we expect people to unload their junk in our presence unto absolution if we ourselves subscribe to AC XI without practising it? Senkbeil's words are aptly quoted in full:

Previous generations of Lutheran pastors have much to teach us. First, that pastors need pastors. What would you think of a physician who never sought medical care himself? I am personally convinced that a large share of the heartache, despair, and ungodliness everywhere on the increase among clergy and church workers in the Synod is due to the fact that we do not practice what we preach. It is a great tragedy that those who themselves every Lord's day go about absolving sins of penitent sinners are not themselves penitents. Our forefathers knew that every pastor needed a *Beichtvater*,⁷ a confessor to whom he went regularly to pour out his heart and to confess his sin; there from the mouth of his brother to hear God's Word of warning and encouragement, judgment and grace, tailor-made for the complexities of his own soul.⁸

As we ponder I Timothy 3:1-7, I am struck by a certain tension between Titus 1:6-9, where Paul places high the bar for admission to the pastoral office, and Titus 3:3, from whose scope the apostle excludes neither Titus nor himself: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another" (RSV). To what extent can past (even post-baptismal) black marks on a man's record be overlooked in virtue of his repentance and prolonged continuance in godly life? For Senkbeil's insightful observation surely describes not a few situations that we ourselves have encountered:

As our society becomes increasingly godless, all indications are that more men will be coming to the seminary with increasingly heavy spiritual baggage. If wounded souls of would-be pastors do not find healing prior to ordination, it only intensifies an already all-too-familiar pattern: disaster in parsonages and shipwreck in congregations.⁹

⁷ So Walther, 157, 168.

⁸ Harold L. Senkbeil, "Generation X and the Care of the Soul", in Paul T. McCain & John R. Stephenson, eds, *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1999), 298.

⁹ Senkbeil, 302.

Now Senkbeil's warning of the dreadful consequences of failing to deal with the "increasingly heavy spiritual baggage" carried by some entering seminarians is a two-sided coin. Inasmuch as the pastoral office and the means of grace exist and operate on a seminary campus, a seminary is itself not only a place of learning but also a place where *Seelsorge* is offered and received. The classroom lurks always in the ray of altar and pulpit. Lutheran Orthodoxy was right to stress the *usus* or practical application of every article of faith. Chapel services should instill a pattern of sustenance and prayer (not least of the intercessory sort!) that a man takes out with him to his first and subsequent calls. Christ can and does use even seminary professors to heal the souls of wounded seminarians who wilt under the burden of "increasingly heavy spiritual baggage". As such seminarians lose their baggage in the manner of John Bunyan's pilgrim passing Calvary, they become sensitive to the needs of their own future baggage-laden parishioners.

In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Treebeard the chief Ent stands out from the other enemies of the Dark Lord Sauron in his determined renunciation of all haste. "Don't be hasty," he counsels the hobbits Merry and Pippin again and again. I've already referred to the caution against haste to ordain issued by the Holy Spirit through Paul. Yet haste is the universal pivot of North American culture, which is apt to forget that the growing season God has implanted in the fields exists analogously for souls also. It takes time for a man trained in another discipline or even schooled heretofore in no discipline to acquire sufficient theological skill that he can calmly and lucidly explain the rule of faith from Holy Scripture and the Book of Concord. It takes time to develop the habitual piety requisite in one who is to be a spiritual father in the household of God. In the meantime we face mounting pressures of all sorts, and in the case of the smaller seminaries the temptation to lower the bar yet further is exacerbated by a dearth of high-quality incoming students. Should a small seminary such as Concordia, St. Catharines, raise the bar high as the Holy Spirit demands through Paul and as the Lutheran tradition insists through Walther, we would run the danger of becoming like All Souls College, Oxford, which is a research facility made up of all faculty and no students. But in these times we cry out from our own poverty and impotence to the Lord seated at the right hand of the Father and interceding for us in the heavenly holy of holies who wants to form shepherds for His sheep. And a speaker at such a conference as this comes as much to learn the answers to our besetting problems as to prescribe them. ... In short, and in response to the topic assigned me, I venture the definition: that man is most suitable for the pastoral office who suffers from a minimum of spiritual blockages and who can articulate with his lips the faith once delivered to the saints.

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RHETORIC AND MEDIA IN THE JUDGEMENT OF ST PAUL¹

Thomas M. Winger

ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

“**U**se of Modern Media in Communicating the Message.” Like most of the speakers at our conference, I received this topic as a gift not of my choosing. At the risk of seeming ungrateful, I must confess that I have responded to this assignment by turning to something a little more familiar: St Paul and his epistles. Now this is not entirely inappropriate; after all, as Christian theologians we cannot approach the use of modern media as a purely sociological or pragmatic issue. We want to know whether there is any relevant teaching in Scripture. We want to know whether there are media that are inherently incompatible with the content of the message, the Gospel. When the famous Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan wrote, “The medium is the message” [*The Gutenberg Galaxy*], he did not mean that the medium **should be** the message. Rather, in studying the impact of the printing press on Western culture and thinking, he merely observed that the medium has never been neutral. On the contrary, the medium is a tool that limits what can be said, colours the meaning of what is said, and influences the thinking of the people at both ends of the communication process. The medium is at the very least part of the message—an observation that lends urgency to the question before us.²

Some voices within the Christian Church, however, have disagreed. It has been frequently asserted that the medium is nothing more than a tool, and that the content of the message is not affected by the adoption of new technologies or techniques of communication. This untenable perspective could be challenged quite successfully on the basis of research done by McLuhan; Harold Innis, his mentor; and the rest of the so-called “Toronto School”. But instead of following that road any farther, I would prefer to examine closely the oft-cited biblical basis for this view, St Paul’s words in chapter nine of I Corinthians:

¹ This essay was presented to the ILC seminaries conference in Erfurt, Germany, 31 March–4 April 2004.

² On the relevance of “media criticism” to biblical studies, see T. Winger, *Orality as the Key to Understanding Apostolic Proclamation in the Epistles*, unpublished dissertation (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1997), 73-93.

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (I Cor. 9:19-23 ESV)

On the basis of this passage, these voices contend that Paul declares the Gospel to be compatible with any medium or method, that the end, as it were, justifies the means. And the means appear to be quite astonishing: if Paul can put himself back under the Law in order to gain Jews for Christ, and in the next moment live outside the Law in order to gain the Gentiles, then surely there are no lengths to which he would not go in order to accomplish his goals.³

Certain details of the text might support this interpretation. Paul describes his purpose with the expression: ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω. The verb κερδαίνω “to gain” is clearly used in the NT with evangelistic connotations. In I Peter 3:1, when Christian women take their proper place in relation to their unbelieving husbands, the latter κερδηθήσονται “may be gained” without a word. Similarly, if you show your brother his sin and he listens to you, ἐκέρδησας (aor. act. 2s of κερδαίνω) “you have gained your brother” (Mt. 18:15). This is the sort of “gaining” for the kingdom of God that Paul would like to see multiplied by the judicious use of his freedom, that he might gain τοὺς πλείονας—probably not “the majority”, but rather “more than would otherwise have been gained”. Similar language concludes the paragraph, as Paul writes ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω “in order that ... I might save some”. But here the crucial question is what Paul means by the adverb πάντως. Supportive of the view under consideration is the translation “through every possible means”. In contrast to this is the translation suggested by BDAG, “that I might save *at least* some”. Thus we have a choice between a triumphalist reading of the pericope in which Paul expects to gain the majority of people by the use of every possible means, and a more sober interpretation in which Paul hopes by relinquishing certain “rights” to gain a slightly larger remnant than he would have otherwise.

What are these “rights” that he sets aside? Within these verses Paul makes two different illustrations. **First** is his identity as a Jew by race, and the rights or obligations that entails. Paul is justly proud of his Jewish

³ It is on the basis of this text that Luther framed his famous paradox: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (*The Freedom of a Christian* [1520], AE 31:344).

identity (as he famously “brags” in II Cor. 11:22), and on certain occasions he voluntarily observes some regulations of the ceremonial Law in order not to add to the offence of the Gospel (e.g. Acts 16:3 [the circumcision of Timothy]; 21:26 [where Paul takes four men to the Temple to complete their vow]). On the other hand, his identity in Christ transcends his race, and since in Christ the ceremonial Law is fulfilled, Paul is able to live without it when preaching to the Gentiles. Note, however, that in neither case does he alter the substance of the Gospel message: the moral Law still condemns sinners, and the Gospel of Christ still sets them free from the Law. This accommodation to his audience, then, is not so much about the medium of the message, but the life Paul leads while proclaiming it—which leads us to his **second** illustration.

“To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak.” Who are the ἀσθενεῖς, and in what way did Paul become weak like them? The two possible answers lead us out of this pericope and into its immediate context. On the one hand, it is possible that Paul is thinking of the “weak” in conscience and knowledge. These are the Christians, new or immature, who have been offended by their brothers’ eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols in the Corinthian temples and then eaten in communal meals or sold off cheap. Paul has referred to these offended brothers as ἀσθενής “weak” five times in the previous chapter (I Cor. 8:7-13). If they are the referent, Paul would have become “weak” by refusing to eat the offensive meat in their presence, thus showing solidarity with them. On the other hand, Paul does not appear to be speaking here of “weak **Christians**”, but “weak people” who are the object of his mission. Recent sociological readings of this epistle have stressed the significance of class and status in the very Roman city of Corinth. According to this view, the weak “are people who are most probably the vulnerable in socio-political terms, forced into dependency on patrons, owners, or employers, which makes decisive initiative or boldness a foreign habit of mind.”⁴ If they are the referent of “weak”, then it is easy to see how Paul “became weak” in order to gain them: he gave up the high status that could have been his, and lived in Corinth as a simple workman. He entered into their social class. And this he did, in his words, διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον—not “for the sake of the Gospel” (as most translations), but “because of the Gospel”. To do this is to live out the implications of the message he carries. As an apostle both his words and his actions proclaimed the Gospel. Anthony Thiselton, whose recent commentary on I Corinthians neatly and thoughtfully summarises such research, concludes:

⁴ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC] (Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 706.

To stand alongside the Jew, the Gentile, the socially dependent and vulnerable, or to live and act in solidarity with every kind of person in every kind of situation is to have a **share in the nature of the gospel**, i.e., *to instantiate what the gospel is and how it operates*.⁵

We are now beginning to place Paul's words into context, but we have some way yet to go. It is critical to investigate how these words fit into the argument Paul has been pursuing since the beginning of chapter eight, and which continues to the end of chapter ten. The main question is whether Christians may eat meat that has previously been sacrificed to a pagan god. Those who say "yes" do so on the basis of "knowledge", "rights", and "freedom". After all, we know that the idol has no real existence (8:4), and that for the Christian "all things are permitted" (10:23a; cf. 6:12). Paul's argument concedes the facts of the matter, that their knowledge is true, and that these rights and freedoms exist, but he contends in response that "not all things build up" (10:23b). Because this action might lead weak Christians back into the worship of false gods, it may be necessary to set aside this right. Paul then shows his rhetorical skill by the use of a "proof": he raises the example of his own ministry. Although he had the right, under God's Law and by cultural tradition, to earn his living from preaching the Gospel, he chose not to take any remuneration from the Corinthian people. Instead he set up shop with Priscilla and Aquila as a tent-maker (Acts 18:1-3). He worked each day as a common labourer rather than accepting the support of a wealthy patron, as he had in so many other places during his missionary journeys.

If Paul is raising this practice as an example to the Corinthians for their behaviour in the matter of meat sacrificed to idols, the question then arises: in what way might Paul's accepting payment for his preaching scandalise the weak or, in his words, "put an obstacle [ἔγκοπήν] in the way of the Gospel of Christ" (9:12)? In order to answer this, we need to examine the social context of first-century Corinth. In 146 BC Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans, who had come to the aid of their Spartan allies. A hundred years later (44 BC) Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman *colonia* (πολίτευμα), and it was later made capital of the senatorial province of Achaëa. Thus, although the Greek influence on religion remained strong, culturally it was the most Roman city Paul had yet visited.⁶ It was also a bustling commercial city, straddling the isthmus that separated the seas leading east to Asia from the seas leading west to Italy. It thus became one of the largest commercial cities in the Roman world. The original mix of freedman, veterans, urban tradesmen, and labourers, whom Caesar had

⁵ Thiselton, 707. In all quotations from Thiselton the emphases are original.

⁶ For the evidence, see Thiselton, 3-6.

moved to his new colony, were thus ambitious and upwardly mobile, constantly vying for status and the power that comes with it.

In such an environment, money was a crucial tool for achieving these goals. Whoever became Paul's patron, if he were to allow Roman cultural norms to influence his relationship with the apostle, would expect reciprocation of his patronage. Anthony Thiselton explains:

it would seriously compromise his [Paul's] obligations to support "the weak" and the equal needs of the whole community at Corinth if he had mortgaged his primary obligations to the "friends" or "patrons" from whom he derived special support. ... While Graeco-Roman writers most certainly perceived friendship as a "bond," Seneca is not alone in talking of an explicit return or benefits which even friendship entails. Friendship brings "advantage" (*utilitas*) in Cicero's view. "To regain the advantage, the recipient is obliged not merely to reciprocate but to outdo his benefactor in generosity." [Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, 11] If Paul could not provide this in monetary terms, no doubt the rich "patron" would expect some *quid pro quo* in terms of status, influence, or leadership role within the church.⁷

We now can see that there are far deeper implications to Paul's renunciation of his rights in this matter. If he were to accept pay from a rich patron, that patron might expect special privileges from Paul in return. Paul's renunciation of this right is therefore not simply a matter of expediency, a strategy for the success of the mission. In fact, though he may have made friends among the working classes for taking such a stand, he may very well have hurt his cause over all, if one were to evaluate his ministry strictly on the grounds of outward success. Thiselton observes:

Paul's "self-humiliation, his assumption of a servant role" [Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 21] was directly at variance with the expected and accepted values of Corinthian city culture. "In a city where social climbing was a major preoccupation, Paul's deliberate stepping down in apparent status would have been seen by many as disturbing, disgusting, and even provocative." [ibid.]⁸

But Paul has not taken this decision purely on pragmatic grounds. Though he is concerned "to gain more people" (9:19), his actions are dictated primarily by the very nature of the Gospel itself. In this case, the medium is indeed inseparable from the message.

⁷ Thiselton, 662-63.

⁸ Thiselton, 13.

NOT IN WISDOM OF SPEECH

Now, if Paul's being "all things to all men" did not include accepting money in exchange for bestowing status on his patrons, would Paul at least capitalize on the status and success he might easily attain in Corinth as an accomplished orator? Certainly Paul was well-schooled in the techniques of classical rhetoric, the art of argumentation in speech and writing. All his epistles display the careful structure and logical progression taught by that discipline. While it may seem that we have only come to appreciate Paul's use of rhetoric in the 25 years since Hans Dieter Betz published his groundbreaking commentary on Galatians, the truth is rather that the first three quarters of the 20th century was the first era **not** to understand classical rhetoric. Commentators on Paul from the Fathers through the Middle Ages and into the Victorian era take for granted that Paul writes, as they would, in accord with the principles laid down in the ancient rhetorical handbooks of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Is this, then, a model for our appropriation of modern communications media in proclaiming the Gospel?

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians would appear to answer with a resounding "no", at least on the surface. Certainly, Paul opens his letter with a rather positive statement about his public speaking in their midst: "in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge [ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνώσει]" (1:5). Here Paul takes up the Corinthian buzz words λόγος and γνώσις, "speech" and "knowledge", and asserts quite boldly that he brought these things in fullest measure. As we shall see, the Corinthians would beg to disagree; but the point Paul wishes to make here in his *exordium* or prologue is that "in Christ" they have received true speech and the authentic Word, despite what they might think of Paul's presentation of the message. In his prologue Paul gains a favourable hearing for his message by giving thanks for their reception of the gifts. But his criticism is not long in coming.

"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, not in wisdom of speech [οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου], lest the cross of Christ be emptied" (1:17). Thus begins Paul's renunciation of the art of rhetoric, or so it would seem. In order to understand this, we need to delve more deeply again into the ancient city of Corinth. For, as recent studies have demonstrated, it is important to make a distinction between the art of rhetoric as described in the handbooks and practised in Rome in the Second Sophistic movement of the first century, on the one hand, and the degenerate type of rhetoric practised in provincial towns such as Corinth, on the other. Provincial rhetoric was not so much a tool in the noble quest for truth as a manipulative instrument in the relentless quest for social climbing—and in this regard, "rhetoric" in places like Corinth appears remarkably similar to certain

modern uses of media such as commercial advertising and political spin. As Thiselton again summarizes for us:

Corinthian culture has much in common with the social constructivism, competitive pragmatism, and radical pluralism which characterizes so-called postmodernity as a popular mood Indeed, as Stephen Pogoloff convincingly suggests, while the concern for *facts, truth, and rationality* remains central to the more “classical” Roman attitudes of Cicero and Quintilian, the reductive and contrived “instrumental” rationality and rhetoric *which looks not for truth but for applause and success* characterizes more readily the kind of competitive rhetoric which was most highly prized at Corinth.⁹

What mattered was not absolute truth, but popular opinion. “Rhetoricians were employed, like some in the media or public relations today, to present a spin which shaped popular or public *perceptions* of what was *believed to be* the case.”¹⁰

Today, at least in the English-speaking context in which I live, we tend to use the word “rhetoric” in such a pejorative way. We dismiss high and flowery language that fails to address the key issue as “just so much rhetoric”. But when we consider the use of rhetoric in the ancient world, we must not fail to make a clear distinction. In classical terms, rhetoric is the art of logical argumentation, and as such is embraced by Paul to the extent that it can be used in service of the Gospel. On the other hand, the provincial rhetoric he encountered in Corinth was much closer to that which holds such a negative connotation today, and this he decisively rejects:

Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian ... saw “the art of persuasion” (Aristotle) or “the science of speaking well” (*bene dicendi scientia*) as the study of methods of articulation and expression, but not in such a way as to disengage this from rational argument and from passion (or at least concern) for truth. As soon as provincial rhetoricians in such cultures as Roman Corinth came to stake everything on the approval and applause of the audience, “truth” lost its anchorage in the extralinguistic world and became a matter of social construction or “local” perception.¹¹

What had happened in Corinth was that the city’s commercial interests had co-opted the noble art of rhetoric for their own purposes:

The pragmatic criterion of becoming a winner in the marketplace, sometimes with a sacrifice of personal integrity, made its impact on Corinthian rhetoric. “... The drive for adulation, we learn from Seneca the Elder, often overcame the more basic goals of rhetoric.” [Pogoloff, 175] Seneca observes that too

⁹ Thiselton, 14. Here Thiselton cites Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Thiselton, 13.

¹¹ Thiselton, 42.

many times the aim was “to win approval for yourself rather than for the case.” [*Declamations: Controversiae* 9.1] Quintilian laments that rhetoricians, like athletes or singers, were “greeted with a storm of ready-made applause ... shouts of unseemly enthusiasm. ... The result is vanity and empty self-sufficiency ... intoxicated by the wild enthusiasm of their fellow-pupils.” [*Institutio Oratoria* 2.2.9-12] The casualty is truth; the focus is “the speaker,” as in the case of the twenty-first century chat-show host or participant in the mass media. It is of little surprise that party groups following their chosen leaders in the form of personality cults spring up (cf. 1:10-12, below).¹²

Paul’s decisive rejection of the temptation to frame the Gospel ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου “in wisdom of speech” (1:17) must not therefore be interpreted simply as anti-intellectualism, as an outright rejection of human reason or logical thought, nor as a refusal to accommodate his presentation of the Gospel to the needs of his hearers. However, Thiselton’s analysis of Corinth suggests a definition of ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου that is profoundly relevant to our question:

Given what we have already noted from a wide range of modern scholars about attitudes toward rhetoric in Roman Corinth, it is plausible to associate σοφία with practical instrumental cleverness or skill, and λόγος with calculative communication. On this basis Paul may well mean *not by manipulative rhetoric*.¹³

This decidedly negative translation of the key phrase conveys quite accurately what it is that Paul rejects—and why:

But how does this make the cross emptied (κενωθῆ)? *If everything rests on human cleverness, sophistication, or achievement, the cross of Christ no longer functions as that which subverts and cuts across all human distinctions of race, class, gender, and status to make room for divine grace alone as sheer unconditional gift.* The connection between rhetoric and social class gives this the sharpest possible point.¹⁴

We are now prepared to hear the continuation of Paul’s argument in I Corinthians 1:

¹⁸ For the word of the cross [Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ] is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? [ποῦ σοφός;] Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? [ποῦ συζητητῆς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου;] Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [οὐχὶ ἐμώρανεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου;] ²¹ For since, in the

¹² Thiselton, 15.

¹³ Thiselton, 143.

¹⁴ Thiselton, 145.

wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom [ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν], it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe [εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας].²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified [ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον], a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (I Cor. 1:18-25)

Paul here emphatically stands on the side of substance in the style-versus-substance debate.

His renunciation of payment for preaching the Gospel is therefore part and parcel of a much larger picture. Paul refuses entirely to be received as just another one in the constant stream of professional orators vying for attention in the marketplace of Corinth. He goes on to assert: “And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God according to a superior sort of speech or wisdom [καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας]” (2:1). The peculiar Greek term ὑπεροχή, which literally refers to a prominent natural formation like a mountain peak or rocky projection, is used here in a figurative sense approaching the modern English catchphrase “upwardly mobile”. Paul refuses to take this role. Thus, when in his second letter to the Corinthians he notes his opponents’ jeer, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account” (II Cor. 10:10), we should not understand this to mean that Paul was a poor public speaker, as is so often asserted. It rather testifies to the truth of his claim to have renounced the provincial rhetorician’s persona, a style that can be clearly described on the basis of early sources:

The specific style which Paul opposed and disowned is described by Bullmore as “public display oratory” associated with the Second Sophistic. Stylistic virtuosity won audience approval, in contrast to Paul’s conscious choice of “a simple and unaffected style which draws no attention to itself.” [Bullmore, 225] ... All of these writers, including Bullmore, cite primary sources, especially Plutarch [*Quaestiones Conviviales* 8.4.1], but also Dio Chrysostom [*Discourses* 8:9; 4:14], on the competitive showmanship of local provincial rhetoric at the Isthmian games. One could hear crowds of “wretched sophists” competing for applause, while rhetoricians were called in to entertain diners between courses at banquets.¹⁵

Here we clearly discern a medium of communication that is incompatible with the Gospel by its very nature.

¹⁵ Thiselton, 205.

Christian proclamation does not allow for **high-sounding rhetoric or a display of cleverness** which could impede the gospel *by putting first what pleases the audience* and the personal “style” of the speaker. The apostle does not arrive with displays of pomp and applause. To convey Paul’s point of emphasis we have, in effect, placed σοφίας in quotation marks. Paul renounces “preaching for effect” in the sense of parading **cleverness** in the eyes of the audience.¹⁶

In its place, Paul sets up a persuasive language of an entirely different nature: “and my speech and my proclamation were not in enticing words of cleverness [ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις], but in the proof [ἀποδείξει] of the Spirit and power” (2:4). Most interestingly, Paul here does not reject rhetoric as a whole, but he sets one rhetorical tool in opposition to another.

Everything rests on “Paul’s contrast of πείθω and ἀποδείξει.” [Pogoloff, 138] In Aristotelian terms, Pogoloff argues, the former depends on “rhetorical methods to sway you to γνώσις ... clever arguments based on opinion”; the latter “is grounded on something far more sure ... the necessary proofs [ἀποδείξεις] of God’s spirit and power.” [ibid.] Paul wants to let *truth* speak for itself, *not to manipulate rhetoric to sway his audience by appeal to opinions*. Aristotle sets out this contrast in his three books *On Rhetoric* [1.1-3 (1354a); 1.1.11 (1355a)] and in the *Topics* [1.1 (100a, 18-100b, 23); 1.4 (100b, 11-16); 1.8 (103b, 1-7); 1.11 (104b, 1-3)]. Aristotle agrees with Plato that logical proof should have clear privilege over the dressing up of “opinions” to make them seem convincing.¹⁷

It is not that persuasion itself is incompatible with the Gospel, but that the Spirit’s power must do the persuading on the basis of the truth of the message—and Paul is quite confident of the Spirit’s ability to do so without his resorting to deceptive commercial methods. After all, the medium must correspond to the message, and the message is of the Spirit. “For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God [ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ]; for it is foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand, because they are discerned through the Spirit” (2:14).

As Paul draws this discussion to a close, he concludes with a striking positive statement of his self-identity in the proclamation of the Gospel: “Let a man regard us in this way: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God [ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ]. In this case moreover, it is required among stewards that one be found trustworthy” (4:1-2). The message is not his to do with as he pleases. He is but a ὑπηρέτης, an underling, helper, subordinate, and an οἰκονόμος, a

¹⁶ Thiselton, 208-9.

¹⁷ Thiselton, 219.

steward, household manager, one entrusted with the administration of another's goods. This is the way he would have the Corinthians look at him, even at the risk of reducing himself in their estimation. He is but a servant carrying a message.

FAITH COMES BY HEARING

I have dwelt perhaps overmuch on the social and rhetorical situation of Corinth as described by Anthony Thiselton in his recent commentary on I Corinthians. But ever since I heard him speak at the Senior NT Seminar in Cambridge last year, I have been struck by the remarkable relevance of Thiselton's exegesis. He himself notes the strong parallels between the market-driven economy of Corinth and our modern world:

The commercial and business prosperity of the city, as well as its competitiveness, pragmatism, and pluralism, brings us nearer to the heart of similarity with ... some twenty-first century contexts of gospel proclamation. ... [T]he prosperity of Corinth rested not upon rents, taxes, and consumer items from its own territorium of Corinthia but upon its effectiveness as a service economy to tradespeople, merchants, travelers, and those seeking the resources of a well-equipped business center.¹⁸

In the light of Thiselton's observations, it is disingenuous to argue that the post-modern world calls for a complete shift in how we communicate the Gospel. Social mobility, the worldwide and market-driven economy, religious pluralism, a relativizing of truth, and the triumph of style over substance¹⁹—none of these supposedly post-modern characteristics is so very different from the world that Paul himself faced. One final word from Thiselton surely brings home this fact:

Paul made a firm decision (1:18) not to aspire to the status of a professional rhetorician, newly arrived to market the gospel as a consumer commodity designed to please the hearers and to win their approval. Whether or not such a strategy would have been successful, the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ excluded its being treated as a market commodity tailored to the tastes and desires of market consumers. The power of the gospel lay in an utterly different direction, and to treat it as a commodity to be offered in a competitive market by manipulative rhetorical persuasion would be precisely to empty it of its power, i.e., its effectiveness to save and to transform those to whom it was proclaimed as kerygma (20-21)

¹⁸ Thiselton, 10.

¹⁹ Cf. Thiselton, 17.

If we accept this final word, does it require us to answer the question of the use of modern media in communicating the Gospel entirely in the negative? This has not been the goal of my investigation. No amount of social reconstruction can evade the plain words of St Paul with which we began: “I have become all things to all men, that at the very least I might save some” (I Cor. 9:22). But we have seen that these words are not ours to do with as we choose, but must be heard within the context of Paul’s entire argument concerning meat sacrificed to idols and his renunciation of manipulative rhetoric. The Gospel is not a product to be marketed to the consumer by whatever means necessary. There are means of communication that are consistent with the very nature of the Gospel as both a gift to man and a message of truth revealed by God. It is His Word, not ours. We are but stewards who administer the Lord’s gifts according to our “terms of reference”. In the discussion to follow, I am certain that many practical issues will be raised that issue from these exegetical thoughts. But I hope that we will not forget those terms of reference, that mandate from our Lord. There is a medium for the Gospel which is a *sine qua non*: “When you go, therefore, disciple all the Gentiles by baptising them ... and by teaching them” (Mt. 28:19); “repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be preached in my name to all the Gentiles” (Lk. 24:47); “devote yourself to the public reading [of Scripture], to preaching, to teaching” (I Tim. 4:13). What all of these mandates from our Lord have in common is their unrelenting commitment to the spoken Word. To this extent we are not free to choose whichever medium of communication suits our intended audience. Newspapers and magazines, radio, television, or internet, mime or drama, each must be evaluated according to Paul’s criteria and the nature of the Gospel. But in the end the exclusive truth of Paul’s words must stand: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through the preaching of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

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SERMON: PSALM 116¹

John R. Wilch

“Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the Death for those faithful to Him”
(Psalm 116:15)

Night before last, we experienced, among others, some ghosts and devils running around, even a few skeletons—scary reminders of death. Death! But, in our text, the psalmist does not try to frighten us with that prospect. Yet, he highlights death in a very special way: Instead of using the usual Hebrew construct state for “the death of” someone (מֹת *moth*), the absolute state is employed with the definite article—“the death”. Further, instead of the common masculine form, it here has a feminine ending. This all creates the impression that death is being personified, הַמָּוֶתְהָ *hamMawethah*, “the Death”, as we do when we speak of “the Grim Reaper”.

Nevertheless, this oversized treatment of the Death is not to be feared here. Rather, like the creation of one’s life, one’s death is under God’s control. Death is not really an inevitable power, but rather our transition from this earthly life into everlasting life. At least, “those faithful to Him” have nothing to be afraid of.

The term, הַסֵּיד *hasid*, often rendered “pious, godly, or saint”, is closely related to the noun הַסֵּד *hesed*, often rendered “goodness, kindness, mercy, love, loving-kindness, or covenant faithfulness”. That last alone comes close to its basic, primary sense, as scholars attest who have extensively researched it. הַסֵּד *hesed* concerns the loyalty someone exhibits in deeds to the promises he made when he entered into a solemn agreement with someone else. So, David was faithful to his covenant with his best friend, Jonathan, by, after becoming king of Israel, providing for Jonathan’s last living son, the cripple Mephibosheth (I Sam. 7:9). And the aged Barzillai the Gileadite, who had pledged allegiance to King David, risked his life by bringing provisions to David and his men when they fled Jerusalem from the rebel Absalom (17:27-29). For, if David should lose out, Absalom would surely have Barzillai executed. David later returned that demonstration of fidelity by admonishing his son Solomon to favour Barzillai’s survivors

¹ This sermon was preached in the Martin Luther Chapel of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, Ontario, on the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, 2 November 2004.

faithfully (I Kgs 2:7). By risking his life for David, Barzillai was “faithful unto death”.

On his part, David valued the deaths of Jonathan and Barzillai as “precious”. This is the first word in our text—it refers to something that is “costly, highly valued, esteemed, dear”. Its use here calls to mind the promise of God to the people of Israel at Mt Sinai, that they “shall be My **special treasure** out of all the peoples, for to Me belongs all the earth” (Ex. 19:5). That term, סְגֻלָּה *segullah*, indicates one’s most valued possession of all. There, it referred to the people of Israel. Here, יָקָר *yaqar*, “precious”, refers to all those who are faithful to the LORD, the God of life and death. They belong to Him as His most precious possession. Because He lives, they shall most certainly live with Him beyond the Death.

Our Lord Himself confounded the Sadducees by proving to them with a masterful syllogism (Mt. 22:31-32) that, as God is the God of the living, He as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will raise them from the Death to live with Him for ever in His New Creation. This of course means that the Old Testament patriarchs, as well as all other Old Testament believers, believed in life after death. After all, it was not long after the death of Adam that Enoch was translated into everlasting life to prove that believers in the LORD—those faithful to Him—live for ever.

These are the ones faithful unto death, the “faithful departed”. These “faithful unto death” include, for example, Martin Luther, my departed sainted parents, all your departed loved ones in the faith, and also the martyrs from John the Baptist and the apostles to today’s martyrs in North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Several years ago in southern Sudan (this was not in Darfur that is inhabited by Muslims, but in the Christian south), the Muslim government’s army attacked a Christian village, burned the houses, killed the adults and infants and captured 27 children. The thirteen girls were taken away to become slaves or concubines in Muslim households, which is regarded as converting to Islam. The soldiers tried to force the fourteen boys to convert to Islam by torturing the older ones in making them lie on live coals, and in beating the younger ones. None of them renounced their faith. That night, the older ones, despite their burns, managed to escape, but the younger boys had been beaten to death. They were “faithful unto death”.

In the Revelation of the Apostle John, our Lord encourages us all: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). This is essentially the New Testament equivalent to our verse in Psalm 116. Today, the day of a momentous election in the United States, let us remind ourselves that all of us who are faithful to our Lord have been elected by Him to an everlasting office.

We are most grateful to our Lord for granting to us His sacraments of Holy Baptism and His Holy Supper, which make us children of God through

regeneration and which renew our faith and fidelity through His Body and Blood. However, they are not magical talismans. It is quite possible to fall from grace, or to so rely on our church connection or our churchly good works, that we become hypocrites whom our Lord will cast aside with the words, “I never knew you” (Mt. 7:23). Only those who “are faithful to Him”, who remain “faithful unto death”, receive the crown of life.

Because of our sinful nature, we cannot do this on our own strength. But, God encourages us to trust completely and only in our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He guides us to renew our Baptism daily through contrition and repentance, and regularly to renew our faith and fidelity through His Word and Holy Supper. Thus, we are precious to Him, and our death will usher us into the perfect joys of everlasting life.

“Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the Death for those faithful to Him.”
Amen.

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