

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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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).
- LSB *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006).
- 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

My co-editor, Dr Ed Kettner, often remarks with modest surprise at the way the essays randomly contributed to this journal coalesce into a theme. So it is that without conscious planning we present a volume with a fair bit on the topic of preaching. This should be no surprise for us Lutherans, who traditionally speak of the Office of the Holy Ministry as *Das Predigtamt*, “the preaching office”. This work occupies the greatest chunk of a pastor’s time each week—or at least it should, as it is the one opportunity when he can make the greatest impact on his flock all gathered in one place. I am often awestruck by the rapt attention our congregations give us preachers when we step into the pulpit: do I really deserve the time they are giving me? The answer, of course, is no. But Christ’s Word deserves it, and it is He who speaks through the office that represents Him. So the burden of preaching is great: to speak His message faithfully, boldly, lovingly, relevantly, and persuasively.

The two faculties of LCC were duly impressed by Dr Stephen Chamber’s careful explanation of the art of preaching, and I was pleased to see him repeat it for the ILC World Seminaries Conference in South Africa. He artfully balances the obligations to text and people, presenting a fresh path to the preparation for preaching. Give it a try.

For many years I had the privilege of listening weekly to the artful sermons of Reg Quirk, my colleague and parish pastor in Cambridge, and one of the finest preachers I have ever heard. His sermons are posted each week at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/westfield.house/Sermons.html>. Listening to a few will give a new appreciation for the depth of biblical interpretation a sermon can offer. Here we offer his essay on a fundamental topic, “Justification and Preaching”, that throws in a few twists from a New Testament perspective.

LCC has no dearth of good preachers, whose work is offered in each issue of *LTR* as an example and inspiration. This issue presents sermons by Pastor Kurt Lantz and retired professor Dr John Wilch, both on Old Testament texts. Each is Christ-centred and creative.

Pastor Erv Brese, adjunct instructor at St. Catharines, has long advocated “narrative preaching”, the indirect proclamation of Law and Gospel by drawing the hearer into sympathy with richly painted characters. “The Emmaus Road” is not a sermon as such, but an essay forming a fine example of the art.

The context of preaching is, of course, public worship. An extraordinary number of LCC congregations have already embraced *Lutheran Service Book* within the first year of its life. Two LCC pastors (David Saar and the

undersigned) worked long years in committee towards its appearance, and many other LCC members contributed on a smaller scale. “The General Absolution in Light of the Nürnberg Controversy” is an example of the kind of detailed research that stands behind this hymnal. It explores the ongoing debate in the Lutheran Church over the legitimacy of absolving an entire congregation in the public service.

Pastor Alex Klages’s brief hymn study demonstrates the same theological care that can and should be exercised at the local level when using any worship resources, even hymnals produced within our own fellowship. The old historical dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* reminds us that if you do it often enough in public worship, people will believe it—a promise and a warning.

Pastor Kurt Reinhardt expresses this pastoral obligation well in his explication of “The Call to Care”. In a consumer society we are often tempted to package the Gospel like fast food—but a steady diet of fast food is fatal. Pastors, like doctors, need to set their sight on the long-term health of their flock.

Finally our old friend from down under, John Kleinig, gives the second instalment on “subordination”. In volume 17 of *LTR* he persuasively argued on the basis of the New Testament that subordination is part of God’s created order, and need not be viewed negatively or oppressively. In this issue he pursues this theme by tackling the thorny problem of Jesus Christ’s own subordination to the Father within the Holy Trinity.

The date beneath this foreword occasions a little embarrassment when compared with the official date of this issue. For many years the timely production of this journal has suffered from the excessive load our two faculties bear. As always, we welcome submissions from the pastors of our church, who are theologians in the place where the Lord has put them. Nonetheless, though begging the faithful reader’s continued patience, we hope to close the calendrical gap quite soon. Two conferences celebrating the work of C. S. Lewis and Paul Gerhardt were received with great joy in the past two years; their essays will shortly appear as the next two volumes of this journal. Your patience may soon be rewarded!

TMW

St Mary, Mother of Our Lord, AD 2007

SHORT STUDY:
“JESUS SINNERS DOTH RECEIVE”

Alex Klages

One of the more familiar Lutheran hymns is “Jesus Sinners Doth/Will Receive” (*Jesus nimmt die Sünder an*), written in the late 1600s by Pastor Erdmann Neumeister. He was born in 1671, studied at Leipzig, receiving his Master of Arts degree in 1695, and served, as a Lutheran pastor in several locations: Bad Bibra, Eckartsburg, Weissenfels, Sorau, and, at the time of writing this hymn, Hamburg, where he served at St James’ Church until his death in 1756. He had a custom, according to Fred Precht’s article in the *Lutheran Worship Hymnal Companion* (hymn 229), of often concluding a sermon with a hymn text of his own writing. This particular hymn is based on Luke 15:1-10. It was first published in a volume of his hymns entitled *Evangelische Nachklang* in 1718. The preface to this particular collection stated that Neumeister’s hymns were “in contrast to the new hymns of the fanatical Enthusiasts in which they subtly hide the poison of their new teaching.”¹ Neumeister was noted for defending Lutheran orthodoxy in a time when Pietism was gaining a strong foothold.²

In the English translation with which most of us are familiar (*LW* 229, *TLH* 324), there is a rather unfortunate, even un-Lutheran, rendering of the fourth stanza:

Come, ye sinners, one and all,
Come, accept His invitation;
Come, obey His gracious call,
Come and take His free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe:
Jesus sinners doth receive.

This translation made it past doctrinal review for both *TLH* and *LW*, and while not necessarily outside of Lutheran understanding, it certainly could be read as Arminian in leaning. It almost looks as though dear Pastor Neumeister has given in to the Pietists and Enthusiasts, as the onus is put on the sinner to come to Jesus, to accept and obey. While accepting and obeying are within the purview of the saint already redeemed by Christ, the sinner apart from Christ certainly cannot.

The German for this stanza reads, however:

¹Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship: Hymnal Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 243.

²The bibliographical material is derived from Precht, 712-13.

Kommet alle, kommet her,
 Kommet, ihr betrübten Sünder!
 Jesus rufet euch, und er
 Macht aus Sündern Gottes Kinder.
 Glaubet's doch und denket dran:
 Jesus nimmt die Sünder an.

I would like to propose that those of us who wish to retain this stanza of the hymn (although it appears that *Lutheran Service Book* 609 has excised it altogether) should render it as follows:

Come, all sinners, come you here,
 Come though gloom and doubt betake you
 Jesus calls you—do not fear!—
 He will God's own children make you!
 Firmly in these words believe:
 Jesus sinners will receive.

This rendition, while still taking some poetic licence, holds truer to the German and the focus on Jesus' calling rather than on what we do in response to His calling. As such, it holds truer to Pastor Neumeister's desire to hold forth the Word of God in Law and Gospel to his hearers.

Rev. Alex Klages is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Morden, and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Winkler, Manitoba.

SHORT STUDY: THE CALL TO CARE

Kurt Reinhardt

Hundreds of cars sail through the drive-through at Tim Hortons every day in Listowel. The line often stretches down the street so that people can pick up their coffee in a hurry. You sit in your car. You speak into a box. Give your order. Drive up to the window. Put your cash into an outstretched hand. You get your coffee and off you go. The growing trend in our world is toward fast and convenient service. People can't "waste" time on one another because they have places to go and people to see.

Our world will survive like this even if it does become a colder place to live. The danger, however, is that this thinking is also creeping into the church. Many people today would like the pastor to simply be an employee of the congregation, who like the server at the drive-through window hears the order through the box and hands the coffee out the little window. The pastor should simply give out the gifts of Christ, without any questions or concerns about who is receiving them. The pastor, after all, is simply a servant. He is only an instrument of God. What business does he have in my personal life?

Whenever we consider anything to do with the Lord we need to look to His Word for the answer. If we simply respond from our own understanding we run the risk of making our answer God's answer instead of making God's answer our answer. Our Lord Jesus speaks of the apostles (the first pastors) as instruments. The Lord says of them, "He who hears you hears Me and he who rejects you rejects Me" (Luke 10:16). Pastors are one of the means Christ uses to be with His Church even unto the end of the age. When the pastor carries out Christ's commands of baptizing, forgiving, communing, preaching, and teaching you have the Lord Himself doing these things (Matthew 28:19-20).

Of course, the pastor is not personally Jesus, but Jesus works through his person. He is a personal instrument. He is not a hammer or screwdriver, but a steward. He is a servant that the Master has put in charge of His household (Luke 12:41-48). He has a calling from the Master to give the household their food at the proper time. If he fails he will have to answer to the Master. The pastor feeds the household of Christ with the Word of God (John 21:15-17). This Word calls people to repentance and gives them forgiveness through the blood of Christ. If the members of the household are repentant then it is the proper time for the Pastor to give them Christ's forgiveness in

His gifts (John 20:23). But if they refuse to repent, he would be unfaithful to confirm them in their sin by giving them the gifts of Christ (I Corinthians 5:1-5; Revelation 2:20).

If people want the Lord's gifts, then the Pastor not only has a right but a responsibility to know the state of their spiritual health. He is not a detective who should go around investigating their personal lives, but as the steward of the household he needs to deal with problems that come to light. Like a shepherd who sees one of his sheep wandering into danger he has not only a right but a responsibility to call that sheep back (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Sometimes the sheep listen and the angels in heaven rejoice over the sinner who repents; sometimes the sheep do not listen and the pastor grieves along with the angels. The pastor concerns himself with the lives of the sheep because the Lord has entrusted them into his hands.

In a drive-through world it is a lot easier for pastors to provide fast and efficient service with no questions asked. In a society where everyone has his own truth and morality the pastoral call to be concerned with the right faith and right life of the household is a difficult one. The simple solution would be to allow everyone to have his own truth and morality and freely give him what he wants when he wants it. Such a pastor, however, is no true servant of Christ and sacrifices the eternal lives of the household members to make his own life easier. The Lord Jesus will not praise the servant who allows his brothers and sisters to go to hell because they have wandered into error or are living in unrepentance. The love of Christ demands that the pastor be concerned about the lives and faith of those entrusted into his care.

My faith is personal. It is, in a sense, between me and Jesus; but to give such faith the Lord has established the Office of the Ministry. He has given us pastors. He wants those pastors to be involved in our lives so that we may be kept in repentance and true faith in Him. There is no Jesus who lets us live and believe whatever we want. There is only a Jesus who calls us to repentance and faith in Him. This Jesus is the one who sends us pastors so that we may truly know Him and hear Him as they speak His Word to us. A Jesus who doesn't speak to me through His faithful steward can very quickly become the Jesus I want Him to be, rather than the true enfleshed Son of God. The Lord loves us too much to leave us in such error and danger and so He has given us pastors to be involved in our lives for the sake of our salvation.

Rev. Kurt Reinhardt is pastor of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kurtzville, Ontario.

SLOWING DOWN TO THE SPEED OF FAITH (THE EMMAUS ROAD)

Erwin A. Brese

The walk of faith is a journey that takes time and develops as it goes. Even the Story of Salvation, the biblical story, took time to move from Creation to Incarnation to our present time of waiting. The process of “faith” is so short-circuited today by a world, inside and outside of the church, that wants instant gratification and success; it is addicted to speed and rapid advancement, a silver bullet, a quick fix.

So when it takes several hours to walk seven miles then, we imagine it to be quicker than that. A faster world has distorted our understanding of things in their due time, of healthy growth, instead of the cancerous speed of deadly growth.

There is something deadly about obsession with instant faith that simply requires acceptance of some simple principles, or a born-again experience. The world and the world in the church seems to demand faith that is depicted in the seed that falls on rocky soil, which flourishes, but then dies quickly (Mark 4). The church, also, has trouble being patient about the longer haul that it takes to produce a fruitful harvest.

In speaking to these issues, the following rendition of Luke 24 is hereby given.

THE SETTING

Yes, it was Easter Day, which looking backward for us has a clear series of events as recorded in Scripture. Everything has a context that is essential for understanding and growth. The resurrection is connected to the crucifixion and death of Jesus. The shocks of those events are enormous. Anyone who has experienced grief (is there anyone who has not?), knows that the shock makes the liveable world stand still. We expect the world to go on as it did yesterday, always moving ahead, but grief sends us reeling backward. We are caught up hitting a stone wall or in a frozen time warp, with a loss of life. It takes some thawing out, some time of reconciliation with the reality that someone close to us is gone, no longer alive in this world.

The reactions are wild and irrational: We must join that other person in death to stay connected. We must do something to get them back into our world. We must blame someone else or God for not being fair. We must sue somebody or hate somebody or die. The reactions are strong and human; our

mortal status is never accepted at an emotional level. We are alive, and others who are important to us must also be alive.

The two disciples who left Jerusalem that Easter Day were in shock. Cleopas and his daughter (I take Walt Wangerin's depiction of the other disciple as Cleopas' daughter; see *The Book of God*) were going home without really understanding what they were doing. They were doing the usual, trying to gain a footing on the unusual, the bizarre, the stuff that was incomprehensible in the shock in which they were caught. They lived in the suburbs and decided a retreat to their home was a way to gain some distance and perspective on the radical events that shook them.

They were acquainted with the other disciples of Jesus. They had witnessed some of His activity, especially in Jerusalem, and were caught up in the enthusiasm that involved a hoped-for new beginning for the people of God, including the eventual overthrow of the Roman occupation of their homeland.

This was fuelled by Cleopas' dream of getting his own life together better since his wife had died and left him with the task of raising their daughter, who had become his constant companion and "partner" in maintaining a household. He wanted to move on with his life but had grown dependent on his daughter's support and helpfulness. It was hard to even think about her growing up and making a life of her own with another man. Why couldn't things work out the way they were supposed to? Why hadn't his wife lived to be his life-long companion? Yes, he carried some residual anger from that grief as well. He could blame God like the rest of us people!

THE FIRST MILE

It was a reasonable day for a walk. They had bid the other disciple friends farewell. It wasn't raining, and the sun was out, but they didn't notice the weather since they were locked in their own shock and gloom. The steps towards home were slow and heavy, part of them thinking they ought to remain in Jerusalem with the others who were huddled together in fear of being assaulted by the Jewish leaders and sent to Pilate like Jesus had been. After all, those angry and zealous religionists were trying to rub out all traces of this Jesus. Cleopas felt they would be safer at home in Emmaus, away from the hotbed until things had cooled off a bit. He needed time to think. He slung his pack over his back and headed out of town.

Slowly they trudged on, sometimes looking back to see if the city had changed or was even still there. Rarely did they look down the road to note familiar landmarks along the road they already knew so well. There were other people on the road, some moving towards them, trying to get to

Jerusalem before sundown. They may have been out working in the farms around the city. Perhaps they were away, and hadn't heard the tumultuous events that had taken place there in the past few days. Cleopas and daughter pretty well ignored those they faced coming into the city, especially those who looked like members of the priestly class or soldiers out on patrol or other assignments.

"Maybe we should go back," the daughter said. "There is nothing we can do at home, and maybe something will turn up to change everything." She had a child-like faith that believed more in magic than did her father. She thought they ought to explore the story of the women who said Jesus was alive. Sarah, for that is what her mother had named her, had less experience with grieving. Her mother had died when she was quite young, still hoping that someday her dad would give her another mother in her life. Perhaps one of the other women disciples of Jesus would be just fine for Dad, she thought, but never vocalized.

Slowly the city sank into the horizon behind them as Cleopas said less and less, lost in his own despair of the future for himself, his daughter and his country. He acted like God had died, and there was no hope, even though he heard the stories about Jesus being alive, too. That had to be crazy hysteria, he concluded, but he couldn't make sense out of anything. He was alone with himself, even with his daughter at his side.

MILE TWO

Cleopas was lost in thought, but made sure he didn't walk any faster. He saw a group of travellers up ahead, and he wanted no confrontation or even conversation at this time. He seemed locked in his aloneness and feared moving out of it. Sarah turned around suddenly as she thought she heard footsteps behind them. She was right; this stranger was there walking alone in the same direction as they were going. "Oh, hello," she said and then realized that her dad had told her never to talk to strangers, although she felt safe to do so in her father's presence.

The man smiled back to her and moved to the other side of the road so as not to disturb them and to give them their space. Cleopas looked around furtively to see whom his daughter had spoken to. He nodded to the man and turned back to his own walking. Cleopas quietly chided his daughter about talking to strangers, especially after all that was going on. He told her you never know if one of them was following them to have them arrested too. She defended herself a bit, saying the man was a gentleman and didn't look like he meant any harm. She said she was worried about him walking all alone.

The man seemed to keep the same pace as they were taking. At first this worried Cleopas who slowed down a bit only to find the man did the same. Finally the stranger spoke, "You folks seemed to be walking in some fear." Cleopas' immediate reaction was to tighten up even more. This man either was too clever or too naïve for his comfort. He chose to walk further in silence, partly hoping the stranger would give up conversing and quicken his pace since Cleopas and Sarah were still plodding along. However, the stranger was content to walk in silence alongside of them.

Sarah let the silence pass awhile, but she just had to speak up after a bit. She started a bit of chitchat. "Dad and I live in Emmaus. Are you headed that way also?" The stranger nodded but respected Cleopas' desire for some silence. So finally Cleopas spoke up as well. Out of fear and anger, he said sharply, "Are you the only one who doesn't know what just happened back there in Jerusalem?"

"Well, it's a big city with much going on daily. What happened that has you so upset?" said the stranger. Cleopas began to detail the events of Jesus' last days and the political hopes many harboured for this man as a leader to champion the Jewish future out from under the harsh Roman rule. He caught himself as he realized he has made himself quite vulnerable to this man if he was a Roman sympathizer, so he tried to modify his words somewhat. "I mean there's been a secret meeting of the Sanhedrin while we slept. They had Jesus arrested and handed over to Pilate with charges of treason, demanding he be executed. He was crucified out on Golgatha with others on death row just before Passover. The city's in turmoil. Surely you heard all this?"

The stranger nodded as if all the facts were in order but he seemed to ask Cleopas to make sense out of all this. Cleopas continued, "Now this morning some women who had gone out to the grave site to anoint His body and grieve. They came running back with news that His body wasn't there. They told of seeing angels instead who said Jesus was alive. Now that is preposterous."

The stranger calmly nodded, and they walked somewhat further in silence.

MILE THREE

Sarah broke the silence again when it looked like neither of the men were going to speak further. "One of those ladies is our relative. I know she would never lie. I believe her, so maybe they didn't really crucify Jesus dead after all. Maybe He was just wounded and recovered, or maybe it was a miracle."

The stranger puzzled a bit. “The Roman soldiers are very careful about those executions. They would never give away the body unless it was surely dead. In fact, they drive spears into the body to make sure he’s dead before they take the body down. They would be in line to be crucified themselves if they didn’t follow through on their orders to crucify a man until he’s surely dead.”

“That’s right!” said Cleopas. He paused and muttered, “That’s why it just doesn’t make any sense.” More silence followed, but Sarah was the one who usually broke it. “Well, then, it must be a miracle. I often pray that God would bring back my mother. I understand Jesus even made a man come alive again in Bethany after he had been in the grave for 4 days.” “Sure, sure,” chided her father, “some women can imagine all kinds of things if they are really wishing for something like that to happen, but I can’t base anything on that.” Cleopas was really getting into this discussion now with some animation.

“You must be a friend of Thomas,” said the stranger, which made Cleopas pull up with a start. “How did you know that?” he insisted.

“I’ve been around all the disciples of Jesus over the past week, and I don’t recall you being among them. How do you know Thomas?” There was a faint smile on the face of the stranger but He simply said, “Oh, I’ve had some discussions with him, too, but it all goes back a ways.”

MILE FOUR

The pair was intrigued by the stranger’s words and stared at Him with questioning eyes. He began to talk about the old days, the really old days. He began with how God made everything new out of nothing, how He made a new world after it was destroyed by the flood, how He made a new nation out of Abraham’s seed.

He kept making a point that God comes through with a gracious surprise just when everything looked like it was all over. He recounted the story of Abraham, who was at the end of life without an heir, but how God intervened and gave him and Sarah a son when he was 100 years old. Then, when son Isaac was just a young lad, how God told Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and sacrifice his only son. Abraham did what the Lord commanded even though it looked like the end of the line for his life and the life of Isaac.

The stranger drew a dramatic picture of how God provided a substitute sacrifice for the altar Abraham had built, a ram caught and waiting. Cleopas and his daughter seemed to rejoice with Abraham at being given back a living son.

The stranger moved on to recount the story of God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorra while rescuing Abraham's nephew, Lot. He talked about Abraham's seed, the children of Israel over which God watched in good times and bad. They listened attentively as he told the stories of God's leading Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, leading them through the waters of the Red Sea and into the land of promise in which we now live. He noted that the voices of the prophets kept talking about a future salvation of God's people. He noted how He used the prophets to comfort His people taken away into exile.

It wasn't that they hadn't heard these stories from their childhood. These were stories that had been handed down for generations. It reminded Sarah of her mother who used to tell these stories to her as a child. However, this stranger was telling them in a way they hadn't heard before. It was like it wasn't a history lesson, but a story in which they were involved in the present. They were captivated and felt drawn back to the earlier times of their own lives. They were walking forward on the path, but in many ways they were walking backward in their thinking, feeling, and understanding.

Finally, Cleopas intervened. "You tell those stories so well. It almost sounds like we're hearing them for the first time, even though we grew up with them. You remind me of the story of the prophet Jonah, who was sent with a message from God to Nineveh. He went in the opposite direction and ended up in the belly of a big fish for three days before being given a new lease on life to go to Nineveh to speak a word for God. Somehow I just connected that story with Jesus. Maybe He had to be dead in the earth for three days before coming back to life to speak more words for His Father, whom He called God. It makes me wonder if He isn't around doing that right now."

The stranger nodded. "It really is all one story, isn't it?" He commended them for putting themselves in the story of God and His people. "Maybe the old Rabbi was right when he said: God made man because He loved stories."

Time was flying as they listened to the stories. The landmarks were flying by without them paying them much heed. They didn't even notice how they were walking in perfect step with the stranger as the miles went by. Their pace had quickened.

MILE FIVE

"And so," the stranger who had brought them into the present situation in Jerusalem continued, "it really is the fitting work of God to bring His Son into this world. He has let Him rub elbows with us, experience our fears and

pains, and to suffer and die for everyone, but rise again to give all people hope and an eternal future.” A long silence came once again.

This time Cleopas broke it. “Well, the way you tell it sure puts a different slant on things, but I’m filling with fear again that maybe we’re too close to God. Can He really be here in all this confusion and turmoil in Jerusalem? It’s hard for me to fathom. Why doesn’t everyone understand this the way you explained it?” More silence.

Sarah broke in this time. “I sure like the way you tell stories. You remind me of my mother. I could listen to her for hours too. I so miss her. Do you think there is a resurrection for her also? I mean, I can only imagine what that would be like.” Before the stranger could answer, Cleopas took the stage again. “Are You a Rabbi? You don’t talk like one of those in Jerusalem. They had nothing good to say about Jesus. And yet, you seem to know the Scriptures better than they do, or surely tell it in a different way. You make it sound like God had this very day in mind a long time ago. Here we are just walking along as if we are in the story.” The stranger smiled. “If we all look for the coming of Messiah, then were are all part of the story, are we not?” They both nodded.

While it been a grey day so far, the sun seemed to break through the clouds, which did not go unnoticed by Cleopas. He said, “Thomas told me that Jesus once took Peter, James, and John up a mountain where a bright light broke through the clouds and a loud voice said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” I wasn’t sure it happened, but hearing You talk makes me think it did.

The trio walked with lighter steps and quicker as they kept going over the stories the stranger had narrated. Cleopas and Sarah added some personal stories of their own of how God had blessed them over the years, even through the death of their wife and mother. They couldn’t quite afford to live in the big city, but their country home was cosy and meeting their needs. They had their own garden and animals. They certainly did better than the beggars they saw in the city.

MILE SIX

The sun was getting lower in the western sky and some of their neighbour’s places were coming into view. Some were out doing things in their gardens, so they waved as usual. Sarah and Cleopas walked along as if they had just found a great friend whom they were escorting into town. They were glad to have His company. He seemed so calm and undisturbed by the radical things that had happened in Jerusalem. They were eager to point out the landscape and the neighbours to this stranger who had walked with them. Neither one

had been bold enough to ask His name yet, but then, they were hesitant about sharing their own as well.

The discussion continued about God's plan in all this. "Does God really think it is good for us to suffer and die, then?" asked Sarah, who then laughed at herself as she stepped on a bug that she disliked. "Everything in this world does die," He mused.

Her father was still wrestling with his anger with Jesus who left them. "I guess none of us wanted to listen to Him when He said He would suffer, die, and rise again. In fact, I forgot all about Him saying that at all until just now. Nobody likes to talk about dying, especially their own." The stranger seemed to nod and encourage the discussion. He even talked about His early upbringing in a large family with many brothers and sisters. Sarah looked sad saying she always wished especially for a sister. She talked about it being lonely in life, even though she had a dad she thoroughly adored, but it just wasn't the same.

The stranger reminded them of the large family to which they all belonged, those who looked for Messiah to come together. Cleopas remarked about his disciple family that was back in Jerusalem. At the moment they were just glad they all had each other who shared a common walk and talk experience. The last mile seemed to be coming quickly.

MILE SEVEN

"Look," said Cleopas, "we're getting close to home and it's getting towards dark. Surely, You need someplace to stay overnight, so why not spend it with us. We have food and drink to share with You and a spare bed in our upper room, if You prefer. You can see we've brought a fresh loaf of bread back from our favourite baker in Jerusalem."

The Stranger politely bowed and thanked them for the offer. He acknowledged He would not make it to His home by night, reluctantly agreeing to spend the night with them. Sarah ran ahead now to draw some water and have a towel handy for the stranger to wash up before dinner. It was along dusty road they had travelled. This left Cleopas to talk to the stranger alone for a time.

"Your daughter loves you very much," the stranger observed. "Yes," agreed Cleopas, "but I worry about her future. She has nothing except to care for her aging father. I hoped she would marry and give me grandchildren one day, but I fear she won't be able to leave me." "Well," said the stranger, "you spoke with a certain affection when you described the woman who returned to share the story of the empty tomb. Perhaps you should consider her for yourself. Cleopas blushed. "Well, I suppose I should

consider that Mary. She's an honest woman and one who wants to minister to others like Jesus."

Some silence passed as they heard Sarah up ahead greeting others, laughing as she ran. Like her father she was torn between telling everyone whom she met about walking together and not saying a word. They wanted to enjoy His company without any interruption for as long as He was there. Sarah thought it still might be a dream from which she might awaken.

AT TABLE

So her father and the stranger finally joined Sarah. Together they gathered some things to eat and share with this stranger while He washed Himself up to prepare for the food. They were all of the same ethnicity and religion. They asked the stranger to lead the table prayers. They listened to Him say the common prayers, and they began to wonder if they had ever heard that voice before. As they looked up from prayer, He was taking the loaf of bread they had brought and breaking it for them to eat. The words from His mouth shot through them like a sword: "Take, and eat. This is My body which is given for you." They felt something like scales fell from their eyes, and they realized the Stranger was none other than Jesus Himself. They noticed His scarred hands for the first time. They stared in amazement while He faded from view altogether. They were left with the broken bread.

Cleopas and his daughter looked at each other, somehow to assure themselves that they had both seen the same thing, the same breaking of bread, the same Jesus. They hugged each other with joy and ate the bread. They talked about how each had a warm feeling when He told them the stories on the road. This was just too good to keep to themselves. It had taken over 2 hours to walk home from Jerusalem, but they decided to go back and tell the others. Running they might make it before dark, maybe in 45 minutes. Taking nourishment and drink they ran back to the city only to find that Jesus had beaten them there and had appeared to the disciples gathered there as well. It was a bonding experience for them all.

And Cleopas found the other Mary among the group to which he told his story in more detail and with greater fervour than the rest.

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PREACHING IN STEREO*

Stephen L. Chambers

1. INTRODUCTION:

THE PROBLEM OF “MONO” HOMILETICAL INSTRUCTION

One of the strengths of Lutheran theology is the characteristic way it deals with “tensions”. Theologians in other churches often try to resolve them, but Lutherans are usually predisposed instead simply to manage them, holding both poles together and refusing to let go of one or the other. This is the genius of our theological tradition: its ability not just to tolerate but to embrace a “both-and” approach. One of the greatest delights I have as a seminary instructor is helping students come to understand and claim as their own this “stereo” habit of thought—this way of both hearing and speaking in two parallel but distinct “channels” at the same time. For the fullness of what we need to hear, and then in turn speak, often does consist of a two-track message: not this **or** that (a “mono” approach), but this **and** that (a “stereo” approach).

I’m not sure we always do this particularly well, though, when we preach. For sometimes I think we focus so narrowly on the world of the **text** that we virtually ignore the importance of our own **context**—even though the need to focus with equal intensity on both of these “channels” has been recognized and affirmed for a very long time. In the 17th century, the English preacher John Wilkins noted that good preachers are competent at both σύνεσις and ἐρμηνεία: in other words, “a right understanding of sound doctrine **and** an ability to propound, confirm, and apply it unto the edification of others.”¹ Early in the 20th century, the American Lutheran homiletician Michael Reu likewise insisted that “homiletics can never become a merely technical study, for the simple reason that it must derive its distinctive character from the nature and content of the sermon *and* from the characteristics of the hearers to whom the sermon is addressed.”² And just 25 years ago, the Anglican pastor and teacher John Stott wrote a book called *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, in

* This essay was presented in a sectional to the Third ILC World Seminaries Conference, Pretoria, South Africa, 29 March 2007.

¹ John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, or a Discourse Concerning the Gift of Preaching, as it Falls under the Rules of Art*, 1646 (1704⁸), 1, cited by Michael Reu, *Homiletics: A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Preaching* (Chicago: Wartburg, 1922), 25.

² Reu, 27.

which he urged us to pray “that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm; who struggle to relate God’s unchanging Word to our ever-changing world; who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth; but who resolve instead in equal measure to be faithful to Scripture and pertinent to today.”³

Maybe the passage of time has dimmed my memory, but I’m not sure, 20 years after the fact, that my own homiletics instruction was very good in this respect. On the one hand, the goal of listening and preaching “in stereo” was definitely recognized, since Stott’s *Between Two Worlds* was one of our required textbooks. But somehow I ended up learning to preach with a lot more focus on text than on context: not a completely “mono” approach to be sure, but definitely with the balance knob twisted off-center. Few if any of the sermons I wrote as a student would have passed Stott’s test that “A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”⁴

Now that I teach homiletics, I’m coming to understand that this deficiency may be to a certain extent inevitable. Almost by definition, a seminary student lacks a stable parish environment to write sermons **for**. Our centralized model of seminary education forces him to uproot himself and his family and move to a centralized place. There, he’s assigned to a “field-education congregation” that provides him with a ready-made, fixed context. But then he’s asked to start preaching—often, halfway through his first year—before he’s really had a chance to get to know the people. As soon as he starts to feel he belongs, he’s sent out to a different place on vicarage, before being uprooted there too, a year later, so he can go back to the seminary for one more year of studies. It’s no wonder, in this sense, that so many student sermons seem to float in the air like clouds, half-way between heaven and earth. The men who write them hardly even know the people they’re preaching to.

For that matter, we who teach them don’t usually preach very much in a stable parish context either. It’s rare in our circles for professors to be called to a parish in addition to their teaching call. So we “preach around”, here and there: occasional sermons for special celebrations, maybe a bit of relief preaching when parish pastors go on holiday. Once in a long while we might serve a pastoral vacancy and actually get a chance to preach more than one sermon in a row to the same people. But it’s rare for professors ever to do

³ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 144.

⁴ Stott, 10.

more than that. Spending one's sabbatical as a parish pastor is almost unheard of.⁵

Thus, it's not surprising that most of us learn to preach with a much stronger focus on preaching-**texts** rather than on preaching-**contexts**. Homiletics professors don't know very much about their students' past contexts, because they come from all over. They're not involved in their students' present field-education congregations, unless these happen to be the same churches the professors attend. And so the main thing professors and students share **is** the Biblical text—not the contemporary context into which that Word also now needs to speak.

Some of us who teach preaching share a further handicap too, namely, that homiletics is not our major field but a secondary add-on compared to our primary area of teaching. In my case, I spend a lot of time in the first-century world of the New Testament, and therefore my own personal "balance control" tends to twisted more towards the "channel" of the text than towards the "channel" of its present context. I don't want that to be true, but it is.

So, for many reasons, both we who teach preaching and those who actually preach week in and week out sometimes study the people we read about in Scripture more closely than the people we actually preach to on Sunday morning.

2. A SALUTARY CORRECTIVE:

THE SCRIPTURE'S OWN ATTENTION TO CONTEXT

The irony is, of course, that the texts which both our own and our students' sermons focus on are noticeably "stereophonic" in their approach. The Biblical writers seldom if ever understood themselves to be saying **כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה** ("Thus says the Lord") in a vacuum, speaking a single Word for all times and places. Rather, they tended to be keenly aware of the very different settings into which each of them was called to listen to, and speak for, the Lord.

Obviously, genre makes a difference. It would be a mistake to assume that every Biblical book was written with an equally specific, **or** equally general, audience in mind. But certainly the content of the Pauline epistles makes it clear that there was something intrinsically and powerfully "local"

⁵ Although my personal knowledge in this area is hardly comprehensive, I know of only one seminary instructor in Lutheran Church–Canada who has spent a sabbatical serving as a parish pastor (Dr Steven E. Harold, who served as interim pastor at Concordia Lutheran Church, Edmonton, AB, in 1999-2000).

about each of those examples of early Christian discourse. All thirteen were written by the same person within a span of just one or maybe at most two decades, yet only a couple of them seem to have been written with a general, unfocussed audience in mind. One example is Colossians, which Paul asks to have read also in Laodicea (Col 4:16). The other is Ephesians, which in the earliest surviving manuscripts lacks a specific address and was simply written “to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:2).⁶ But even Romans, which we often think of in these same terms as a letter that lacks a specific context, is actually quite specifically targeted. When we read the whole letter closely (not just chapters 1-8, which is about as far as we often get), it is obvious that Paul actually wrote to the Romans for two very specific purposes. First, he writes to introduce himself to a church that didn’t yet know him, so that its members will agree to support him in his further mission-work (1:10-15; 15:23-29). Second, Paul writes to show this particular group of Christians that God’s work in Christ had already united the Jewish and Gentile Christians in their midst into an entirely new thing, a *tertium genus*, the holy Christian Church.⁷ And the rest of Paul’s letters, of course, are even more specifically focused than that. First Corinthians is addressed τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὖσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ—not to the church which is in Athens, or Antioch, or Jerusalem (1:2). Its sequel, Second Corinthians, was written just a year or two later and addresses the same group of people, but does so from quite a different perspective; because the situation was already different there in Corinth, the Word the Spirit led Paul to speak was also significantly different. Nils Dahl noted some years ago that this **particularity** of the Pauline epistles seems to have been one of the things that kept them from being readily accepted in some parts of the church for a very long time. Christians had a hard time figuring out how to read from a universal perspective these letters that had originally been targeted into very specific contexts.⁸

The same feature can easily be seen elsewhere in Scripture as well. True, Richard Bauckham and others have recently challenged the long-standing assumption that each of the Gospels was written to a particular first-century Christian community. But as Bauckham himself recognizes, this does not mean that the Evangelists were writing generic, timeless works for

⁶ The specific identification ἐν Ἐφέσῳ is absent in Ɔ⁴⁶ Ⲭ* B* 6 1739, and probably Marcion as well.

⁷ Evidence of this purpose is clear in Rom 1:16; 2:9-16; 3:9-30; 4:11-12; 8:9-17; 9:22-31; 10:5-13; 11:11-36; 12:3; 14:13-19; 15:5-21.

⁸ Nils Dahl, “The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church”, in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Festschrift for Oscar Cullmann*, ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., NovTSup 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 261-71.

interchangeable audiences. Even if they were not targeted quite as narrowly as a Pauline letter, each of the Gospels, too, demands, and deserves, to be read as a document written for a late first century Christian community.⁹

The three-year lectionary that is now in common use helps us appreciate this point by appointing one Synoptic Gospel to dominate each of the three years of the cycle. Each of these speaks with a particular accent, which attentive preachers can and should learn to recognize. In this same connection, the early church's consistent acceptance of the fourfold nature of the Gospel canon reinforces from yet another direction the "incarnational" aspect of the written Word. Only a few Christians in antiquity, notably Tatian in his *Diatessaron*, seem to have tried to harmonize these four distinct Words into a single, generic account.¹⁰ Rather, most of our Christian ancestors recognized that each of the four Gospels was written by a different author for a different set of readers—even though the subject upon which all of them centred was exactly the same, the earthly life and ministry of our Lord.

Obviously, from a doctrinal point of view, the whole of the Bible—all 66 books, with all of their varying contexts—is equally "Scriptural", equally authoritative as the *regula fidei* for the entire "holy, catholic and apostolic church". But as we actually read each of the different books within that grand library, we're bound to keep stumbling across huge differences of many kinds, between and among those writings. Even though every biblical writer points to Christ, each of them does so from a different perspective—as he first hears God addressing him with a slightly different nuance, then in turn speaks with his own accent as well, into his hearers' situation.

⁹ Regarding the "open" character of the Gospels, see especially Bauckham's own introductory essay, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9-48. Note, however, his careful—and significant—qualification: "The argument does not represent the Gospels as autonomous literary works floating free of any historical context. The Gospels have a historical context, but that context is not the evangelist's community. It is the early Christian movement in the late first century. We can bring to the interpretation of the Gospels everything we know about that movement and its political, social, economic, religious, and ideological contexts" (46).

¹⁰ Despite the *Diatessaron*'s uniqueness, its harmonizing approach was extremely influential, not only in Edessa, where it apparently served as the sole authoritative Gospel for several centuries, but also in other Christian communities, which made use of it in various languages, including Greek, Syriac, Latin, old High German, Old Dutch, Persian, and Arabic. See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 188-89.

3. PREVIOUS RECOGNITIONS OF THIS POINT WITHIN LUTHERAN HOMILETICAL LITERATURE

Thankfully, at least some parts of our conservative Lutheran tradition have recognized this need to be contextually as well as textually attentive, in sermon preparation. This is hardly a full survey, but just to illustrate the point (both pro and con), consider the following examples of English-language textbooks that were widely used in the early twentieth century to teach seminarians to preach. Both books insist that sermons must be thoroughly grounded in the Biblical **text**. But they diverge from each other quite radically in the way they handle the preacher's own **context**.

Theodore Graebner's book *The Expository Preacher: A System of Inductive Homiletics* was published by Concordia Publishing House in 1920, and exemplifies the careful attention to exegesis that characterizes the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod at its best. True, Graebner gives a brief nod here and there to the preaching context. He notes, for instance, that “unless [a] doctrinal, orthodox sermon addresses itself not only to the intellect, but penetrates to the sources of Christian life and action, the emotions and the will, it is not a sermon at all, but a dogmatical lecture.”¹¹ But his book devotes no sustained attention at all to the question of how one might go about doing this. In a chapter dealing with “Textual Study” he presents two detailed examples of sermon-preparation work without so much as mentioning the sermon's hearers in either case.¹² When in a different place he discusses the identity of one's Christian hearers, he uses categories that are exclusively spiritual, not social: “Dear children; children of light; sons and daughters of God; the light of the world; temples of the Lord; members of Christ's body; elect, holy, & beloved”, and so on.¹³ Although Graebner is not wrong to portray Christians in this way, it is quite inadequate to portray people in only this way—focusing so much on the spiritual qualities of **every** Christian that one completely ignores the specificity of **these** Christians who are hearing **this** sermon, **here and now**. Only twice does Graebner even come close to acknowledging their vital particularity. Once is when he urges students to “thoroughly familiarize yourself with the standards of taste which obtain in our American tongue today”¹⁴—a welcome reminder that preachers' language and vocabulary needs to reflect the world of the hearer, not just the speaker. Again, Graebner

¹¹ Theodore Graebner, *The Expository Preacher: A System of Inductive Homiletics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1920), 73.

¹² Graebner, 12-20.

¹³ Graebner, 83.

¹⁴ Graebner, 160.

quotes the Anglican preacher William Gresley, who invites us to “consider all the while we compose and reconsider as we preach, and afterwards, ‘Is this adapted sufficiently to the capacities, to the state of mind, the circumstances of the poor people who are to hear it?’”¹⁵ It’s a good quotation. But what is most telling about it, for this purpose, is the fact that it **is** a quotation, not Graebner’s own thought. Very little attention is paid to the preaching context by Theodore Graebner himself.

Much stronger on this point is the classic book Michael Reu published just two years later (1922), *Homiletics: A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Preaching*. Like Graebner, Reu rightly insists that preaching remain anchored in the Word and firmly focused on doctrine. “Our concern should be”, he writes, “not to seek after new ways of making our preaching effective, but to proclaim the Word of God in all its ancient power, unaltered and unabridged.”¹⁶ At the same time, though, Reu also listens hard to the second “channel” that Graebner ignores: context, as well as text. Even the strongest doctrinal sermons, Reu observes, become dry and boring “when the preacher forgets that he is to *preach*, that he has living hearers before him with whom he is to enter into personal and living contact, whom he is to address, to interest, and by entering into their thoughts, objections and doubts to win to participation in the development of the subject.”¹⁷ If anything, Reu remarks, the diversity of contemporary culture heightens our need to study the detail of our hearers’ lives: “The multiplicity of intellectual interests and the diversity of modern culture at once rule out of court ... ‘general’ sermons, even though it remains true that the Gospel is the same for all classes and that the heart of man is today fundamentally the same as it has always been.”¹⁸

Significantly, the need to listen and speak specifically rather than generally is for Reu not merely pragmatic, but theological; it’s not just a tactic to hold hearers’ attention, but a fundamental part of the preacher’s calling. For preachers, he notes, speak from and to **both** parties in the divine drama—God **and** his people. “On the one hand, the mouthpiece and spokesman of God, he [the preacher] is on the other hand the mouthpiece and spokesman of the congregation.”¹⁹ Reu understands—like Luther before him—that the pastor is charged with listening **and** speaking, with presenting sacrament **and** sacrifice, with serving as a spokesman both from the top

¹⁵ Graebner, 112. The work he is quoting is William Gresley, *Ecclesiasticus Anglicanus*.

¹⁶ Reu, 49.

¹⁷ Reu, 153.

¹⁸ Reu, 134.

¹⁹ Reu, 166.

down (God to us) and from the bottom up (us to God).²⁰ And this is why it is so important for the preacher to “constantly take into consideration the specific character of the hearers”²¹—so he can speak both **for** and **to** them with authenticity. It is **this** assembly of Christians that has called him to preach, not another. Accordingly, **their** lives must become every bit as familiar to him as the life of Christ in Scripture. Concreteness is essential, Reu recognizes, so that “religion, instead of hanging in the clouds, [may] be brought home to men’s business and bosoms and set in the midst of the actual circumstances of everyday life, there to unfold its truth and transforming power.”²² To that end, Reu claims, “The preacher must have an accurate knowledge of his own congregation in order to be in a position truly to edify it. This will involve a study of the social conditions, the circle of ideas, and the vocabulary of his congregation, of its cultural standards in general and its particular interests and tendencies.”²³ A good sermon, in his view, “will do well to avoid harping on the universal sinfulness of mankind; else it will lull rather than rouse. Let it rather deal with sins in the concrete and lay bare the glaring contrast to the divine ideal. Let it describe the terrible power of sin by tracing its continual recurrence even in the life of sincere believers, as well as the guilt of sin by tracing the continual forgiveness of God and the strength of God striving in our weakness.”²⁴

In Reu, then, much more than in Graebner, we find a robust recognition of the twin channels to which a preacher must attend if he is to discharge his responsibility well. For the pastor truly is an intermediary, committed to knowing and representing **both** of the parties before whom he stands, to whom he listens, and for whom he speaks. As our Lutheran tradition has always recognized, the preacher speaks for the Lord—which means that he must listen with the most careful attention to the Scriptures so that his subsequent speaking will be faithful and true. But alongside that time-tested imperative is another, which is equally vital: the need also to listen to the people, to whom and for whom that timeless Word of God is **now** being sent. The preacher stands at the nexus between God’s Word and this world, called to listen and speak in both directions.

²⁰ So Luther, preaching at Torgau in 1544: “My preaching in the assembly of the congregation is not my own word and act, but is done in behalf of you all and of the entire Church. There must needs be one person to speak and utter the word in the name and with the consent of the rest; but the rest by their attention to the Word consent to and take part in the preaching.” Cited in Reu, 67.

²¹ Reu, 27.

²² Reu, 116.

²³ Reu, 128.

²⁴ Reu, 159.

4. A PROMISING METHOD OF DOING THIS:

“THE FOUR-STRAND METHOD” OF SERMON PREPARATION

Several years ago, I became aware of a new and promising method of teaching students to listen and to speak “in stereo”, attending to both the Word and the world. Known as the “Four-Strand Method”, it was pioneered by Professor David R. Schmitt at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in the late 1990s.

Three of its four “strands”, or “threads”, have actually been part of Concordia Seminary’s definition of preaching for many years. Many of us are familiar with it: “Preaching is authoritative public discourse, based on a Scriptural text, centred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, for the benefit of the hearer in faith and life.” Schmitt’s initial insight was that this definition included three key phrases that describe three distinct aspects of sermon preparation. First, because a sermon is based on a Scriptural text, the preacher needs to engage in what Schmitt calls **textual exposition**—“exposing” the meaning a text had for its original hearers, so the preacher can then bridge the gap between that world and his own. Second, because a sermon is centred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the preacher has to think carefully about what Schmitt calls **evangelical proclamation**—deciding exactly where, and how, God’s double Word of Law and Gospel are going to do their work on this particular occasion. And third, because a sermon aims at the benefit of the hearer, in faith and life, the preacher also has to work through the matter of **hearer interpretation**—determining how this group of people here today is both similar to, and different from, other Christians of other times and places.

To those three distinct activities Schmitt then added a fourth, which he called **theological confession**: helping hearers understand how this particular text and sermon fit into the big picture of everything the Church believes and teaches. This is not, of course, a new idea, since preachers (especially in our circles) have been strong supporters of doctrinal preaching for a long time. But what Schmitt did was realize that this, too, is a distinct kind of discourse, supportive of but different from the other kinds already mentioned.²⁵ The best sermons, he saw, use all four of these types of speech:

²⁵ This fourth strand took on specific definition for Schmitt when, in the course of preparing a paper for Concordia Seminary’s 1999 “Theological Symposium”, he read numerous sermons by C. F. W. Walther and realized how effective they were at teaching the faith. The paper Schmitt delivered at that symposium was subsequently published as “Freedom of Form: Law/Gospel and Sermon Structure in Contemporary Lutheran Proclamation”, *Concordia Journal* 25 (1999): 42-55.

we **exposit** the text, we **confess** its doctrine, we **proclaim** the Gospel, and we **portray** our hearers' place within the grand story of God's work in history. That's what the following diagram (fig. 1) attempts to express: the presence within a single sermon of all four types of discourse.

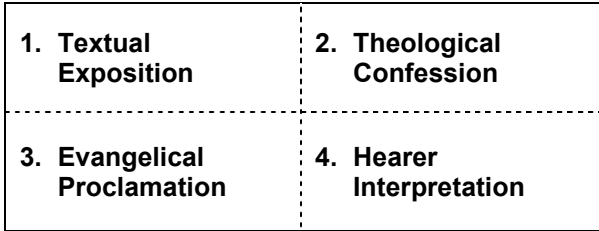


Figure 1: The Four Strands

Several things about this model intrigued me when I first encountered it in the summer of 2002. I had been given the assignment of teaching both of our seminary's courses in homiletics, starting that fall; and because I knew Schmitt from the time we were both students in St. Louis, he was a natural person to ask for help. As soon as I read his course workbook, and especially when I saw this diagram, I was impressed by this model's carefully balanced approach.

If we focus on the distinction between the strands in the top row and those in the bottom row, we see a very important kind of balance coming into focus, as illustrated below (fig. 2). The boxes in the top row (Textual Exposition and Theological Confession) are similar to one another in that they are both God-centred. They call upon the preacher to listen to, and then speak about, the details in this specific section of God's Word, and then in other similar passages, and then also in Confessional discussions about them. At the same time, the boxes in the bottom row (Evangelical Proclamation and Hearer Interpretation) are both hearer-centred, asking the preacher to listen carefully to the lives and stories of the people he's preaching to, so he can target those people as precisely as possible with the Word that flows from the boxes at the top.

The arrows between the God-centred strands in the top row and the hearer-centred strands in the bottom row represent the need to distil the fullness of what the preacher hears "from above" into an appropriately-sized and -shaped Word "to those below". The box at top left, textual exposition, provides an abundance of homiletical raw material, but it is not all equally preachable. Some is only tangentially related to the core business of confronting sinners with the Law and comforting them with the Gospel. Thus, the preacher needs to find among all the bits of textual exposition (top left) the most powerful means of articulating the double Word that condemns and then also saves (evangelical proclamation, bottom left).

Likewise, the preacher needs to discern just which parts of the church's abundant theological confession that arises from this text (top right) are likely to be the most relevant and helpful to this particular group of hearers (hearer interpretation, bottom right). Even a few years' preaching experience will have taught him what homiletics profs belabour in vain: that hearers simply cannot absorb the whole counsel of God on a given subject in every sermon.

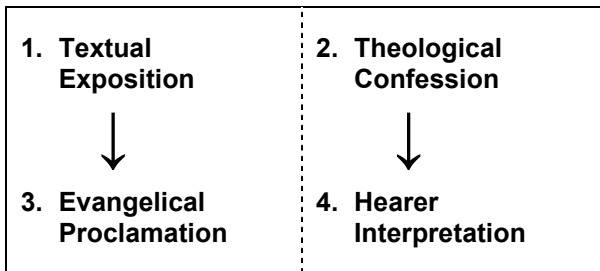


Figure 2: Strands focusing on Word-from-God (top row) and on Word-to-the-hearer (bottom row)

Then, if we emphasize the distinction between the left- and right-hand columns, we see a different sort of balance coming into view (see fig. 3 below). Both boxes in the left-hand column (Textual Exposition and Evangelical Proclamation) provide us with raw material that we might call "text": all sorts of interesting bits in Scripture, and plenty of different ways to articulate Law and Gospel. Once we've got all of that raw material gathered, it's the task of the boxes in the right-hand column (Theological Confession and Hearer Interpretation) to sift and sort it all through, and decide which parts we actually want to use in this particular "context".

The arrows between the text-centred strands on the left and the context-centred strands on the right represent this second filtering process. Dealing with the top box on the left, not all of the nuggets that come to light in textual study can be fully elaborated. It doesn't matter what our text is, more raw material always comes to light when we exposit it than we have time or energy to fully confess. In this sense, we always find ourselves narrowing down textual exposition (left column) into a manageable form of theological confession (right column). Similarly, there are always more potential sources of Law and Gospel (evangelical proclamation) than we can apply to these particular hearers. Part of the preparation process involves deciding which among many possible forms of Law and Gospel will target most squarely the people who will be hearing this specific sermon. Again, we need to make choices among many possible forms of evangelical proclamation (bottom-left box), retaining only those that the process of

hearer interpretation (bottom-right box) suggests are appropriate for this particular occasion.

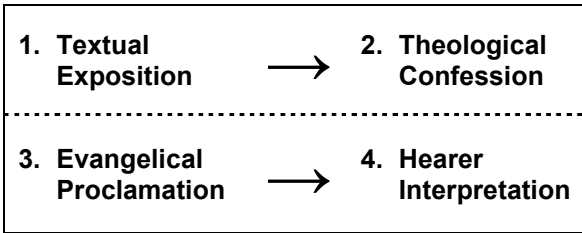


Figure 3: Strands focusing on “text” (left column) and on “context” (right column)

By this point, it’s probably obvious how these different axes (left-right, and top-bottom) got me thinking about the metaphor at the heart of this paper, preaching in stereo. Actually, preaching in **quadraphonic sound** might be a better way to describe it, because there’s not only a “left” channel (text) and a “right” channel (context), but also a “front” pair of speakers (Word-from-God) and a “back” pair as well (Word-to-the-people). As with a good-quality stereo system, we preachers can shift the balance all around, putting greater or lesser emphasis on each quadrants. When my wife and sons and I turn on the radio in our car, this is something we always have to negotiate. Sometimes the sound is too loud in the front and we have to shift it to the back; sometimes it’s unbalanced from side to side, and we have to adjust it toward the middle. The ideal situation is one in which every hearer is able to hear something from all four directions: left and right, front and back.

This is something that impressed me right away with this model: the way in which it reflects the complexity of life. Yes, each of the four strands (or, using the present metaphor, each of the four “channels”) is numbered. But that’s mostly just to help us develop a routine, and make sure that we do in fact deal with all four strands every time, in a focussed and intentional manner. The idea is **not** to force us to think about only one strand at a time: “Right, now I have to do ‘Theological Confession’, so I’d better not let any stray thoughts intrude about ‘Evangelical Proclamation’.” That is neither a natural nor a helpful approach to take. Thus, I no longer use solid lines to divide the diagram that illustrates this method into four discrete boxes, but have begun using dashes instead to demarcate each strand within the overall process (see figure 1 above). The permeability of each resulting box is a recognition that each type of thinking influences all the others.

Translating this insight into the “stereo” analogy, the sermon preparation process is like recording a jazz quartet, using a separate microphone for each of the four musicians. Sometimes one will take the lead and capture our

attention completely for a considerable length of time while he's playing a solo. Then another musician jumps in and does the same thing. But they're all playing in the same key—and they all keep ticking away the whole time, throwing in a riff here and an accent there, even when somebody else formally has the “lead”. So it is in our sermon preparation. We're often thinking along more than one channel at one time as we focus on each of the four phases of the task.

Ideally, the sermons that we write using this method should reflect that same kind of complexity. All four types of discourse should be “woven” throughout the whole sermon, not isolated in rigid blocks within it. Yes, there will be times when one or another strand is **dominant**—when the balance shifts all the way over to the front-left speaker as we talk about Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane, or all the way to the back-right as we help people see how their suffering, too, has deep meaning “in Christ”. But the best listening experience for most hearers is usually a “centred” one, with notes from all four quadrants engaging our attention the whole way through.

Pushing the point a little farther, this means that sermons do not have to move in a fixed and wooden sequence from “Point 1: Textual Exposition” to “Point 2: Theological Confession” (and so on). For one thing, constructing them that way is a good way to guarantee that your hearers will tune you out as soon as they recognize—and get bored with—your predictable sequence. But even more, untangling the four twisted “threads” so that they form independent strands reinforces the compartmentalization that many Christians are already prone to. The text is **here**, our theology is **here**, Law and Gospel are over **here**, and the hearers are over **here**: great, now we've got everything organized! Instead, all four types of discourse—like all four branches of theology—ought to be woven together into a single colourful tapestry.²⁶ The homiletical goal is to use all four types of discourse in every sermon, to present the never-changing truths of God's Word to people who live in an ever-changing world.

²⁶ One of the inherent weaknesses of the traditional fourfold theological method is its tendency to solidify helpful distinctions into rigid barriers, fracturing the theological curriculum into exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical “departments”. This model has come under increasing scrutiny, both within our own circles and more broadly. A notable recent attempt to integrate a seminary's course of studies across departmental lines has been made by the faculty at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

5. IN PRACTICAL TERMS, “HOW CAN I DO THIS?”

Since learning about this “Four-Strand Method” from Professor Schmitt in 2002, I have been adapting and refining it every year as I teach our seminary’s two courses on preaching, Homiletics I and Homiletics II. Briefly, I would like to outline, in broad terms, how I teach students to do this. Preachers who have already learned a different method of sermon preparation might want to consider adapting this method for their own purposes as well.

There are three stages to the sermon-preparation process. In the first stage, each of the four strands is developed more or less separately. Sometimes students develop them on four separate sheets of paper, reflecting the distinct interest of each part. For class purposes, this is what I want them to hand in for “Stage One” of their sermon-study: four discrete sections of work, each dealing with one of these strands.

<p>1. Textual Exposition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ translation ◦ literary analysis ◦ contextual analysis ◦ exegetical statement 	<p>2. Theological Confession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ biblical theology ◦ systematic theology ◦ liturgical theology
<p>3. Evangelical Proclamation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Law and Gospel in text (explicit, implicit, metaphorical) ◦ specific function ◦ avoiding confusion 	<p>4. Hearer Interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the hearers as Christians ◦ the hearers within culture

Figure 4: Overview of the tasks to be completed within each strand

In Strand One, **textual exposition**, the preacher translates his text from Hebrew or Greek, studies its most significant words, thinks about what **kind** of writing it is (and what difference that makes), and analyses out how this text fits into its wider literary context (within that book, that author’s corpus, and the testament of which it is a part). Finally, at the end of this strand, the preacher generates a compact “exegetical statement” that encapsulates two things: what this text **says** (a summary of its content) and what it intends to **do** (a brief description of its function).

Next, Strand Two, **theological confession**, includes three sub-sections. In the first, “Biblical Theology”, the preacher tracks similar theological themes throughout the Scriptures. Then, in “Systematic Theology”, he does the same thing throughout the Lutheran Confessions and other doctrinal works

(often using the scriptural and thematic indices in Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* and in *The Book of Concord*). Finally, the preacher considers "Liturgical Theology", seeking to determine how this text and theme fit within the other liturgical propers for this particular occasion (for example, the Fifth Sunday in Lent) and also within the church-year as a whole. The goal in all three of these sections is to identify as many connections as possible between this particular text (and sermon) with the church's wider confession.

Strand Three, **evangelical proclamation**, challenges the preacher to articulate Law and Gospel in terms of this text. First, what are we **explicitly** told about sin and grace? Then, how might Law and Gospel also be **implied** in this text—and what might we need to do to "draw them out" more fully? Next, what **metaphors** are present that might need unpacking?²⁷ Finally, how (in each of these ways) does this text speak both a killing word of Law that slays our self-righteousness, and a resurrecting word of Gospel that gives us new life through Christ our Saviour? In this strand, the preacher focuses on his hearers as they appear before God (*coram Deo*); the concerns of the "kingdom of the right hand" are uppermost.

Finally, Strand Four, **hearer interpretation**, considers the people the preacher will be addressing on the basis of this text. How are they both similar to, and different from, other Christians who have heard this same text in other times and places? How does the culture in which these people live make it both easy and difficult for them to "hear" this text? How, in turn, would a careful hearing of this text help them to bear witness to its truth within their culture? This is the place where the preacher's own missionary interest will naturally emerge, as he considers his hearers' position within the world (*coram mundo*) and as matters related to the "kingdom of the left hand" come into view.

Obviously, some of these strands will take longer to develop than others, depending on the combination of text and context. A preacher might struggle this week to exposit the text, and next week to articulate Law and Gospel. That's all right. The process doesn't have to be symmetrical, either within a given sermon-study or between one sermon-study and the next. In Stage One especially, the goal is mostly (to use Aristotle's terms) **invention**, not arrangement. The aim is primarily to generate large amounts of raw material that can be sorted through later.

It's Stage Two, then, that deals with arrangement. Its special goal is structure: figuring out how both to **balance** and to **focus** all of this material, in all four strands. There will always be much more material available than

²⁷ A helpful resource book in this regard is J. A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000).

the preacher can possibly use in this sermon, so it's out of that surplus that he now has the privilege of picking the very best for immediate use, and setting aside the rest—maybe for ever, or maybe just until he comes back to this text again, three years later.

How do I help students make these choices? To begin with, we spend time in class reviewing a number of standard sermon structures. But then I also encourage them to use their intuition, relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Where, in **their** opinion, is the “centre of gravity” between all four of these strands—the “sweet spot” that all four channels of the stereo are focusing on? This is the point at which it becomes clear that homiletics is an art, not a science. Having listened to the Lord **and** his people, having considered the fixed-and-immovable text **and** its contemporary, here-and-now context, what does this particular preacher think is the best direction for this particular sermon to take? Once that overall direction is set, everything else usually falls into place fairly easily. The key thing is keeping a central “line of argument” going all the way from beginning to end.

Finally, Stage Three of the sermon-preparation process involves actually writing the sermon. Not to oversimplify matters, but by the time a preacher has worked through Stages One and Two, the actual writing of the manuscript usually goes comparatively smoothly and easily.

This, then, is the Four-Strand Method—the focal-point of our seminary's first preaching course, Homiletics I. Obviously, there isn't time for very much else in this course beyond this method itself. Each student goes through the entire process three times: each time, preparing all four strands through all three stages so he can deliver (in front of the class) his first three sermons. To be honest, doing this is exhausting both for them and for me. Still, I persist, because I want them to understand this process thoroughly at the very beginning of their ministry—not because I expect (or even want) them to do all of this work for every sermon they ever write, but because they'll be better preachers if they **know how** to do all of these things when they need to. I trust them later in the parish to pick and choose which parts are going to be the most helpful for them to focus on in the case of each particular sermon. But at least they have this broad framework of possibilities firmly fixed in their minds by the end of Homiletics I.

The second course, Homiletics II, differs quite a bit from Homiletics I. For one thing, I give the students more assignments: four completed sermons rather than three, plus preparatory work (including outlines) for several additional sermons besides. My aim is to get them moving through the Four-Strand process quickly enough that they'll be ready for the faster pace they'll soon encounter in the parish. For that same reason, I don't require them anymore at this stage to do as thorough of a job on all of the sub-steps in all of the stages. Rather, I let them use their own discretion and focus on

the steps that they think are the most important, as this text intersects with this occasion. I definitely still ask to see their completed work—but only now at the end, when each successive sermon is preached, not all along the way at every stage. Again, I'm looking ahead to the parish and trying to help students experience already at the seminary the problem of having more ideas and options than they have time for. They need to learn to choose among many possibilities just the most important things out of them all. Because many students tend to be perfectionists, wanting to do everything, and perfectly, every time, this narrowing-down process is a bit of a challenge—but excellent preparation for the parish.

My other main goal for Homiletics II is to focus much more intently than in Homiletics I on the **range** of contexts into which students are going to be called on to preach. Homiletics I, in that sense, is mostly about “text”—the left-hand column of boxes in figure 3, both the Scriptural text itself and the Law and Gospel that flows from it. Homiletics II is more about context: the right-hand boxes, proclaiming doctrine in ways that are meaningful to these particular hearers, here today. And so, in this second course, we spend a great deal of time looking at different preaching occasions: weddings, funerals, preaching in series, and so on. We also consider different types of hearers: preaching to women, preaching in a post-modern context, preaching towards the goal of the sanctified life. Again, where Homiletics I gave students the basic skills of writing a decent sermon for a general audience, Homiletics II gives them experience at doing so with a bit more flexibility, taking into account some of the variables that set apart one set of hearers from another.

6. EVALUATION OF THIS METHOD

What have I learned about this method so far? At this time of writing, I've taught Homiletics I four times and Homiletics II five times. On the basis of that experience, I'd like to share with you five observations about this method.

First, I'm impressed with the validity and value of each of these four strands. Textual exposition is definitely where we have to start, precisely because (as I mentioned earlier) the Scriptures were written for specific audiences other than us. We really do need to do our homework in order to bridge the gap that separates our 21st-century culture from the worlds of the Old and New Testaments. Theological confession, in turn, reminds us that this particular sermon isn't being heard in isolation but rather as part of an ongoing series of sermons that together, over time, confess before the Church the full richness of the *regula fidei*. No, this sermon can't say it all:

but it definitely can and should confess some significant part of that wider heritage of faith. Evangelical proclamation then seeks to convert this “Word-from-the-Lord” into a “Word-for-the-people”. What sin does it expose? What hope does it give, centred on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins? Some sermons will indeed speak Law-and-Gospel using the classic terminology of forensic justification—but some will draw on other metaphors and motifs as well. And finally, hearer interpretation recognizes that these Christians in this place both are and are not unique. They are the same as all Christians everywhere because of their common humanity—and yet at the same time they are also utterly unique, created and re-created by the Lord to live his mission in this particular time and place. This is my first observation: that these four strands provide a good range of issues for preachers to deal with.

My second observation is that the challenge of figuring out how to balance all four of these strands and attend to them all in sufficient depth to feed one’s hearers without overwhelming them, is essentially the challenge of the pastoral ministry itself. In ministry, too, coming up with things to say is almost always easier than organizing and presenting those ideas in a way that helps them reach our intended audience. There’s seldom a shortage of raw material to use on Sunday morning, or at the bedside, or at the elders’ meeting—provided that we have, as Karl Barth famously put it, “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”²⁸ The struggle is more often how to sift and sort all of those options and bring out from the storehouse “treasures old and new” to bless our hearers (Matt 13:52). This Four-Strand Method gives students and seasoned preachers alike a means of becoming proficient at both of those tasks: discovering the range of riches that’s available, and forcing oneself to choose among them.

My third observation is that the “stereo” aspects of listening-and-speaking, and attending to both the text and our own context, are beautifully congruent with the Gospel itself. For God’s Word has always been a targeted Word. The pre-existent Word became incarnate as a first-century Jewish man in Palestine. The written Word took shape for specific audiences, from Moses’ day down to the time of John the Seer. Today, that same Word that already spoke into each of those contexts speaks again—through the power of the Holy Spirit—into all of our contexts, day by day and place by place. As John Stott says, “This earthing of the Word in the world is not something optional; it is an indispensable characteristic of true

²⁸ Quoted in Stott, 149. Note, however, that Stott also mentions C. H. Spurgeon’s reference, fifty years before Barth’s comment, to “my little shilling book *The Bible and the Newspaper*.” Regarding the need to take the contemporary situation into account, see the excellent discussion by Reu, 128-44.

Christian preaching.”²⁹ This is why I discourage students from using a “canned” sermon that was written by someone else. No matter how good it might be in the abstract, preaching is not about abstracts, but about the nooks and crannies of idiosyncratic lives.³⁰ Nor do I encourage students to “go back to the barrel” and re-use old sermons that they themselves have written for earlier occasions. As the situation changes, the Word changes too—which, when you think about it, is the main reason we bother writing a new sermon every week. Otherwise, why not just recycle old ones by Luther and Walther? Especially now, when so much culture is globalized, produced for mass consumption by people living on the other side of the world, the personal and local delivery of God’s Word to God’s people is a gift every bit as precious as it is rare. This Word, this day, is “for **you**”—from the Lord who loves for you personally.

Fourth observation: This is a challenging and difficult method of sermon preparation. It sets the bar high and calls on preachers to become proficient at a wide range of skills. Therefore it often meets with some resistance among students at our seminary. They don’t want to work this hard at this many tasks just for one sermon! And honestly, I expect that even the most experienced preachers among us would have a hard time completing all of these strands and stages really well every week. Earlier and simpler methods of sermon preparation are definitely easier to master.

But that leads me to my fifth and final observation, which is that this model’s complexity and fluidity is actually one of its greatest strengths. As far as we preachers are concerned, I really don’t think it would be healthy for us to feel that we have ever mastered the preaching task. It’s good for us to challenge ourselves to mine its potential and ponder its possibilities ever more fully, whether we are neophytes in our first year of seminary studies or seasoned veterans in our fourth decade of parish ministry. And from our hearers’ perspective as well, the beauty of this four-strand approach is that its stereophonic richness becomes apparent only slowly over time. Not every sermon can or should hit every note, but rather each one of them will adjust the “balance knob” a little bit differently, paying more attention to one channel than to the others. **And that’s okay!** Each sermon is just one small building-block in an overall structure of proclamation that arises bit by bit, Sunday by Sunday—and not just during my own ministry among these people either. They heard the Word from my predecessors long before I appeared on the scene, and (God willing) they’ll be hearing it from my successors long after I’m gone. The four-strand method excels at cultivating this long-term perspective, both in our hearers and in ourselves. We don’t

²⁹ Stott, 145.

³⁰ For a similar objection to canned sermons, see Reu, 77.

have to preach the whole counsel of God in every sermon. The preaching task, like the Lord's own work in the world, is a long-term project.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it's perhaps worth pointing out that this paper has itself attempted to model the principles and method it describes.

I myself have tried to read both a "text" and a "context" in preparing it. The "text" is the way I teach homiletics in Edmonton. The "context" is the situation in which each of you, my hearers, have been reading this article. And even though this isn't a sermon, I've tried to follow employ all four parts of the four-strand method in relating this "text" to this "context". I've done some **textual exposition**, relaying some of the details of our homiletics program. I've considered **theological confession**, making connections here and there between particular parts of that program and the wider horizons of the pastoral task. I've tried to present you with what might (by extension) be called **evangelical proclamation**—noting some of our failures to preach well, asking us to face up to those shortcomings, and pointing us towards positive and hope-giving resources that will enable us to do preach better in the future. And finally, I've set this whole paper within the context of **hearer interpretation**—trying to address things that I think are common to us all while also acknowledging that some parts of my situation as a teacher of homiletics are significantly different from your *Sitzen im Leben*, wherever you are presently serving.

So now, my hearers, the onus is on you to engage in this same "stereo" process. The text you have been reading, and will hopefully continue to "listen to", is this paper. You need to do your own exegesis on it as you seek to understand what I've been saying. It's your task to make connections to other parts of your calling, to identify the weaknesses and strengths in your own preaching, and to be strengthened by God's grace so you can interpret all of this in a way that will lead to the edification of those you are called to preach to.

So my concluding encouragement to you is simply this: engage in this process. First, get into your text. Do the hard work of both top-row boxes (**textual exposition** and **theological confession**), so your sermons can deliver rich fare to your hearers. Then, second but no less important, learn about, and love, your context (the bottom-row boxes). Focus intently on your hearers and their setting, so that your preaching of God's gracious Word may truly result in their benefit in faith and life.

There's nothing as powerful as a contextually targeted sermon that draws from the fixed text of the Holy Scriptures an edifying Word for today's world.

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THE SUBORDINATION OF THE EXALTED SON TO THE FATHER*

John W. Kleinig

When I was at university I attended an SCM conference. The main speaker addressed us on the person and work of Christ in John's Gospel. He spoke much about His finished work. At the end of his lecture a student startled him by saying, "You have had lots to say about what Christ did for us 2000 years ago. But what is He doing for us now?"

Initially, the lecturer was thrown by the question. Then after a period of silence, he said that the work of Christ had ended with His ascension. Since Christ had rejoined his Father in heaven He was no longer directly at work here on earth. He had left His Spirit behind to do the work of God in the hearts of people. The Spirit took over where Christ had left off.

That incident has stuck in my mind and haunted me ever since. I knew that the speaker was wrong, but at that stage in my theological development I could not pin down why he was wrong, let alone give a Biblical answer to that important question. Only gradually did I realize that the answer lay in the right understanding of Christ's ascension and His ongoing ministry through the means of grace. That teaching is the foundation for this paper in which I would like to explore some of the Trinitarian implications of Christ's real presence in the church and His apparent subordination to God the Father.

Now, when I argue that the Son is, in some senses, subordinate to the Father, I do not thereby advocate the heresy of subordinationism.¹ It teaches

* This is the second of two papers delivered to the Queensland District Pastors' Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia in June 2004. The first paper, "Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament", which provides important context for this essay, was published in *LTR* 17 (2004-05): 45-59.

¹ This paper is part of a larger debate that has been pursued mainly in evangelical circles between so-called "subordinationists", who hold that the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, and so-called "egalitarians", who hold that any teaching of subordination is inconsistent with the Son's equality with the Father. The present state of this debate is summed up by four publications. On the one side, the argument for the functional role-subordination of the Son is summarized by the 1999 report of the Sydney Diocesan Commission on *The Doctrine of Trinity and its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women* (www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/doc/trinity), and the essays in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Good News, 2002). The other side of the debate is presented most forcefully by Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). His use of Barth and Rahner to enlist the tradition of the church to

that the Son is not “of one being with the Father”. He is, instead, either created from the Father’s being (Arianism) or is only similar in being to the Father (Semi-Arianism). Both these positions deny the full divinity of Christ. The argument in this paper presupposes that the Son is in no wise inferior to the Father as God as confessed by the Athanasian Creed; like the Holy Spirit he is “equal in glory and in majesty” to the Father.

This paper also assumes that subordination does not necessarily entail inferiority. Let me illustrate. All orthodox theologians agree that the eternal Son was subordinate to His Father in His earthly life. According to Luke 2:51, He was also subordinate to His parents. Yet none of us would therefore conclude that He was inferior to the Father in divinity by becoming a human being, or inferior to His parents in humanity by becoming their child.

In this essay I wish to address the question whether the risen Lord Jesus is in any way subordinate to the Father. This means that that I will not deal with three other related matters. The first is the question whether the pre-incarnate Son was subordinate to the Father. This was the focus of the debates in the Early Church. It was resolved by the councils of Nicea and Constantinople and is summarized in the Nicene Creed with two complementary assertions. On the one hand, since there is only one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Son is “of one being with the Father”. Both the Father and the Son are equally divine. On the other hand, there is an order of persons in the one God, an order of origin and orientation in the Trinity. The Son is “eternally begotten **of** the Father, God **from** God, Light **from** Light, true God **from** true God,” while the Holy Spirit “proceeds **from** the Father and the Son”. The Son then is “subordinate”² to the Father as the eternal source of His sonship and His divinity as Son.³ He is always the Son

support his arguments has received a devastating critique from Mark Baddeley, “The Trinity and Subordinationism: A Response to Kevin Giles”, *The Reformed Theological Review* 63.1 (2004): 29-42.

² It may, of course, be debated whether subordination is the best word to describe this reality. Thus Pannenberg prefers to speak of mutual dependence (Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 308-13, 321), but this does not do full justice to the asymmetrical order and character of the relation of the persons to each other, even though it is backed up in part by Paul’s teaching in I Cor. 3:23.

³ The Eastern theologians, beginning with Athanasius, spoke of the Father as the “source” (Greek ἀρχή; Latin *principium*) of the Son and the Holy Spirit (see Thomas T. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: A Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988], 312-13). Thus He alone is their source. When they spoke of the “monarchy” of the Father, they did not refer to His rule as King, but to their “origin” (ἀρχή) from Him and orientation toward Him. Because this was so important for the theologians of the Eastern churches, they rejected the Western addition of the phrase “and the Son” (*filioque*) to “who proceeds from the Father” in the Nicene Creed. This addition was meant to safeguard the Scriptural teaching that we do not receive the Holy Spirit directly from the Father but only through Christ. In his lectures on the history of dogma Dr Sasse suggested that both these

of the Father, just as the first person of the Trinity is always the Father of His only Son. The second matter that will not be considered is the uncontroversial question of the Son's subordination to the Father in His earthly ministry. The third matter that will not be considered is the rather speculative question whether I Corinthians 15:28 teaches that the Son will be eternally subordinate to the Father after the end of the world.

My basic thesis is that the order of the Son's relationship to the Father in His exalted state determines the order of His ministry in the church, the exercise of his three-fold office as prophet, priest, and king. That order does not basically consist in a chain of command from the Father through the Son to the church,⁴ but in a divinely instituted chain of reception that comes from the Father and returns to the Father. It is a process of giving and receiving, the way in which the Father delivers the Holy Spirit and every spiritual gift to His people through the Son, as well as the way in which we offer ourselves and our gifts to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, in short, the order by which we have access to the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18).

1. THE TRINITARIAN DYNAMIC AND ITS ORDER

As Lutherans we confess and teach that the risen Lord Jesus is present in the church in His humanity and divinity.⁵ By His ascension He did not withdraw Himself from His disciples and become inaccessible to them. Instead, He extended His presence, so that it was no longer limited by time and place and matter. Invisibly present, He became accessible to all people everywhere. By His exaltation He filled the whole universe with His presence so that He could give Himself and His gifts to all his people (Eph. 4:7-10). He was exalted so that He could be closer to us than ever before. He returned to the Father in order to bring the Father to us and us to the Father.

teachings about different aspects of the Trinitarian order would be best preserved by the confession "who proceeds from the Father through the Son."

⁴ While the order is not basically a chain of command, St John shows that this order of transmission and reception does involve Christ's obedience and our obedience to commandments of the Father (John 12:49; 13:34; 14:15, 21, 31; 15:10, 12, 14, 17).

⁵ See FC SD VIII:78: "he (Christ) is present with his church and community on earth as mediator, head, king, and high priest. Not part or only one-half of the person of Christ, but the entire person to which both natures, the divine and the human, belong is present. He is present not only according to his deity, but also according to and with his assumed human nature, according to which he is our brother and we flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone (Eph 5:30)."

Three things follow from this. First, since the exalted Lord is with us, He is still at work among us. As Luke implies in Acts 1:1-2, Jesus continues to do God's work and teach His word through the ministry of the apostles in the church.⁶ Second, since He has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, He now pours out on the church the Holy Spirit that He receives from the Father (Acts 2:33). All three persons of the Trinity are therefore now equally present and active in the church. None of them operate separately, or apart from each other. Third, since all three persons work together to deliver salvation to us and all people, the New Testament does not assign particular tasks exclusively to any one person in the Trinity, such as redemption to Christ and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. Yet even though all three persons are always at work in all aspects of our salvation, they, like a man and woman in the conception of a child, operate differently, according to their position and relation to each other as persons in the Trinity. Thus neither the Father, nor the Spirit, functions as the mediator between God and us. The order of relations in the Trinity determines how all three persons work together with each other in dealing with us. That order sets the pattern for the operation of the Trinitarian dynamic in the life and work of the church.

Well, what is that order? We may come at it in two complementary ways,⁷ like the operation of an escalator.⁸ On the one hand, we may begin from below with how we discover it and come to be involved in it. Here Christ is central. We receive the Holy Spirit as a gift from the Father through the risen Lord Jesus (John 7:37-39). We therefore come to the Father **through** the Son by the Holy Spirit (John 14:6; Eph. 2:18). Thus the Godward, ascending order of operation is: through the Son by the Spirit to the Father. On the other hand, we may begin from above with the way that the three persons work together as one in their dealings with us. Here the Father is central; everything comes from Him. So just as the Father eternally begets the Son and causes the Spirit to proceed from Himself and the Son, so, in time, He pours out the Holy Spirit abundantly upon His adopted children

⁶ Luke emphasises this by his use of the verb "began".

⁷ The best summary that I know of the Pauline data on this is: Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zum Verhältnis von Christozentrik und Theozentrik in den Paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1969).

⁸ See the discussion by Thomas T. Torrance on the orthodox correlation of Christocentricity and Patrocentricity in *The Trinitarian Faith: A Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 47-65. He sums up his case thus: "The kind of Christocentricity that characterises the Nicene theology, therefore, is not one that detracts in any way from Theocentricity, but rather serves what we might well call a 'Patrocentricity', and thus gives unreserved place to the Spirit of the Father who is conveyed to us through the Son and on the ground of his saving and reconciling work" (64).

through Jesus Christ in Baptism (Tit. 3:4-7); cf. John 14:16, 25). Thus the human-ward, descending order of operation is: from the Father through the Son with the Holy Spirit.

Whichever way we look at it, we have the same basic order, the same way of working, the same fundamental dynamic. The remarkable thing about this order is that by its operation we are included in the life and work of the Holy Trinity by virtue of our union with Christ. This is the objective order of salvation, the way that the triune God delivers all spiritual blessings as gifts to us here and now in the church through Word and Sacrament. It is also the way by which the triune God delivers the gift of salvation through the church to those who have not yet been drawn into the life and work of the triune God. Thus this order does not present us with an ideal pattern that we must copy, by being like Christ and acting as He has done. It is something that is given to us, a reality that is created by the presence of Christ with us, the way that He works, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to revive and energize, to sanctify and transform us.

It is worth noting that we do not create this order, nor do we generate the spiritual dynamic that is at work in it. This order exists whether we are aware of it or not; it does its work whether we acknowledge it or not. It is to be found wherever the Gospel of Christ is preached and enacted, wherever people receive the Gospel and believe in Christ. If that is so, we have two ways of relating to it. On the one hand, we can fit in with it, by trusting in God's Word, and going along with it in our obedience to His Word, so that it has its way with us. If we accept this order and accommodate ourselves to its claim on us, we will discover its power and enjoy its blessings. In fact, the more fully we live and act in keeping with it, the greater will be the blessings that will come from the triune God to us and the people around us. On the other hand, if we spurn this Trinitarian order and defy its dynamic, we will not receive the blessings that God wishes to lavish on us through it. In fact, the more that we live and act in defiance of it, the more we will suffer spiritual deprivation and impoverishment.

This teaching about the way that the three persons of the Trinity work together in engaging us is intensely practical and actual. The dynamic order by which they reach out to us and include us in their life and work shapes everything that happens in the church. It shapes the way that we evangelize unbelievers by preaching the pardon that they receive from God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ; it shapes the way we baptize and disciple them; it shapes the way we worship and the way we pray; it shapes the way we administer the means of grace and the way we pastor people; it shapes the way we receive the Holy Spirit and the way we live as members of Christ's priesthood. And so on! By our reception of God's gifts and our co-operation

with God in this order, we live as sons of God, together with his Son, here on earth.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE EXALTED SON TO GOD THE FATHER

I would now like to focus on one part of the Trinitarian order, the position of Jesus as the exalted Christ and His relationship with the Father in His ongoing work in the church. This is covered in the Apostles' Creed by its confession of His enthronement "at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty".⁹

If we are to make sense of that confession, we need to note three things. First, this imagery comes from royal ideology and its symbolism in the ancient world. On ceremonial occasions the deputy of the king, his vice-regent, his prime minister, sat on a throne at the right side of the king.¹⁰ That position was occupied either by the first-born son of the king, his heir, or by his oldest brother, if his son was not yet old enough to serve as his deputy. That position was no mere ceremonial office. In fact, the vice-regent ran the royal bureaucracy and administered the government of the kingdom. Sometimes he even functioned as the king's co-regent, as was the case with Jotham, after Uzziah had become a leper (II Chr. 26:21). Yet even though he reigned together with the king, he was still under the authority of the king.

Second, David and his descendants did not reign as supreme monarchs, but as the anointed deputies of Yahweh. The king was the Lord's messiah, his christ, his anointed one. That title had to do with his office and status as the earthly vice-regent of the Lord. So when God the Father anointed and enthroned Jesus as the Christ, He set Him in that vice-regal office (Acts 2:36; 10:38).

Third, even though the office of king was so strictly separated from the office of the priesthood that no king was ever allowed to serve as a priest at the temple in Jerusalem, Psalm 110 prophesied the eventual combination of these two offices by the enthronement of the future Messiah at the Lord's right hand. This was confirmed by the double crown that Zechariah made and set on the head of the high priest Joshua, when he made his prophecy about the future king-priest who would build the new temple of the Lord. Jesus affirmed both these prophecies and applied them to Himself in His great confession at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:63-64; Mark

⁹ See Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-36; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:1-4; 8:1-2; 10:12-14; I Pet. 3:22.

¹⁰ See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1978), 256-68.

14:61-62; Luke 22:66-70). So when the New Testament teaches that Jesus is enthroned as the Messiah at the right hand of the Father, it does not just refer to His office as king. It includes His office as priest who serves before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. In fact, Hebrews 1:1-4 goes even further than that by teaching that the exalted royal Son of God holds the triple office of prophet, priest, and king.¹¹ These are therefore now no longer three separate offices, but they form a single office, which fulfils and so transcends them all. In that office the risen Lord Jesus is under the authority of His heavenly Father, even though He is equal in divinity with the Father who has honoured Him by giving Him the name above all names and calling Him Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

I do not have time to explore how Jesus exercises all three aspects of His Messianic office together with the Father and yet under Him. I will therefore concentrate on the prophetic and priestly work of the exalted Christ, because these two aspects have been most neglected by theologians in our generation. While the teaching on the prophetic work of Christ shows how we as pastors are involved in the order of the Trinitarian dynamic, the teaching on His priestly work shows how the whole church is involved in that dynamic as God's holy priesthood.

The exalted Son of God occupies a prophetic office that did not end with His ascension (Heb. 1:1-4). He is still the Father's spokesman, His mouthpiece. He does not speak His own word, but He utters the powerful, life-giving, judging and saving Word of the Father who sent Him (John 3:34-35; 5:19-30; 7:16; 8:26-28, 38, 40; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 16:12-15). Jesus does not speak on His own authority, but on the authority of the Father (7:16-18; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). By speaking the Word of the Father, He does His Father's will and performs His work (John 14:10; cf. 5:19-23, 30, 36). He says what the Father commands Him to say, and does what the Father commands Him to do (John 12:49). He passes on the life-giving Word of the Father to the apostles, so that they, in turn, can speak that life-giving Word to others (John 17:8, 14-21). As I said before, this prophetic work did not end with His ascension, for by His return to the Father He included His apostles and their successors in His own prophetic ministry (John 14:10-14). Thus the writer to the Hebrews claims that God's speaking through His prophets culminated in His speaking through His exalted Son in these last times, the age of the church. Yet the exalted Son is much more than just a prophet. He does not just speak God's Word, like all the prophets in the Old Testament; He is God's Word, the one who brings us grace and truth from God the Father by His incarnation and exaltation (John 1:1-2, 14, 18).

¹¹ See *A Catholic Catechism for Adults: The Church's Confession of Faith* (Ignatius: San Francisco, 1987), 176-78.

Thus the order for the proclamation of God's Word is its passage from the Father through the Son to the citizens of earth. Just as the Father sent the Son to speak His Spirit to the apostles on Easter Sunday, so the Son commissioned the apostles to speak the Holy Spirit to their hearers and to pronounce the Father's absolution (John 20:21-23).¹² As they, and those who are ministers of God's Word, preach in the church, they stand in Christ before God (the Father) and speak the word that comes from Him to their hearers (II Cor. 2:17;¹³ cf. 12:19). What we have, then, is a chain of tradition in which Christ hands on the Word that He has received from the Father to His apostles (John 3:34-35; 12:49; 17:6, 14); they, in turn, pass on the Word that they have received from Christ to others (John 17:20; I Cor. 11:23-25; II Tim. 2:2).

The exalted Christ also occupies a priestly office that only really began with His ascension to the Father and entry as the God-man into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:24).¹⁴ He serves as our priest before God (the Father), our great high priest who appears on our behalf in presence of God (Heb 9:24).¹⁵ Since He is our priest in the presence of the Father, He is also the mediator between Him and the human family (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).¹⁶ As our high priest He not only stands in for us before the Father; He also stands in for the Father with us.¹⁷ Yet that is misleading, for He does not just act on behalf of the Father and on behalf of us in our absence from each other. He actually brings God the Father and His gifts to us (Matt. 11:27; Rom. 5:1-2); He also presents us and our offerings together with Himself to the Father (Col. 1:22; Heb. 2:13; I Pet. 3:18). We therefore have access to the Father through Him (Eph. 2:18).

¹² I take the clause "they are forgiven" as a divine passive, a Jewish convention to avoid naming God. In the New Testament it is used to refer to the work of the first person of the Holy Trinity.

¹³ A literal translation of this is: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the Word of God for profit. On the contrary, with purity, we speak in Christ as from God in the presence of God."

¹⁴ Hebrews uses the verb "perfect" (τελέω) in a ritual sense to speak about the completion of Christ's ordination and installation as priest in the heavenly sanctuary (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; see Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1997], 65).

¹⁵ See Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:24; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21.

¹⁶ Note the frequent reference to Christ's work as both the mediator of our justification before God and the mediator of our intercession to God in the Lutheran Confessions: AC XX:9; XXI:2; Ap IV:80-81, 162-65, 213-15, 313, 314, 316-18, 358, 360, 372, 375, 376, 378, 387; XII:43, 64, 76; XV:5-9; XXI:14-25; XXIV:58; FC SD III:55-56; VIII:47, 78.

¹⁷ The fact that Jesus mediates between the Father and humankind does not mean that He is any less divine than the Father. In fact, Athanasius and the theologians who drew up the Formula of Concord argue that He had to be fully divine and fully human to bring the Father to us and us to the Father (FC SD III:55-56; VIII:47, 78).

There are two sides to His work as our high priest—the descending, human-ward, sacramental aspect, and the ascending, God-ward, sacrificial aspect.¹⁸ On the one hand, the risen Lord delivers us the fruits of His atoning sacrifice for us in Word and Sacrament. God presented Him, and still presents Him, to us as our mercy seat, the means by which we receive atonement through faith in His blood, the one in whom we have justification and redemption (Rom. 3:21-25). He is therefore now the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world (I John 2:1-2). He who atoned for our sins by His death on the cross and His entry into the heavenly sanctuary, now offers us cleansing and justification before God the Father (Heb. 2:17);¹⁹ He sprinkles us with His cleansing, sanctifying blood in Holy Communion (Heb. 12:24).²⁰ We therefore now receive reconciliation with God (the Father) **through**²¹ our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:11). **Through** Him we have peace with God (the Father) and gain access to His grace (Rom. 5:1-2). We share in God’s holiness in Christ (I Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 12:10). In Christ God the Father now blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm (Eph. 1:3).²² We receive every good thing from the Father **through** Him (Heb. 13:21). Paul describes the descending side of Christ’s priestly work well in I Corinthians 1:30. He says: “You are from him (God the Father) in Christ, who has become wisdom for you from God: righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”²³

¹⁸ As one would expect, Melancthon emphasized this aspect of Christ’s priestly office in the Apology in his debate with the Roman Catholic theologians. While they emphasized the sacrificial aspect of Christ’s work, he gave priority to the sacramental aspect. So when he discussed Christ’s work as high priest and mediator, he spoke most frequently about Christ as our propitiator or our propitiation (IV:41, 46, 80, 81, 82, 157, 165, 179, 211, 212, 213, 215, 221, 222, 223, 230, 231, 238, 242, 244, 245, 246, 253, 269, 291, 299, 382, 387, 389, 392; XII:43, 76; XXI:17, 34). Ironically, those modern Reformed theologians who have written extensively and well on the work of Jesus as high priest, such as the Torrance brothers, largely overlook this aspect, because of their emphasis on the finished work of Christ and their rejection of the real presence of His Body and Blood in the sacrament. You can see this most clearly in the discussion by Thomas F. Torrance on “The Mediation of Christ in our Human Response”, in *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 83-98. See also James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 32-83.

¹⁹ See the remarks on this by Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 69.

²⁰ See John W. Kleinig, “The Blood for Sprinkling: Atoning Blood in Leviticus and Hebrews”, *LITJ* 33.3 (1999): 124-35.

²¹ See the careful analysis of the function of *διὰ* in both a causal and instrumental sense by Thüsing, 164-237.

²² As Luke 24:51 shows us, the ascended Lord Jesus blesses His disciples from heaven, just as the Israelite high priest conveyed God’s blessing to the Israelites with the Aaronic benediction in the earthly temple at the end of the morning and evening burnt offering.

²³ See Thüsing, 15-18.

On the other hand, the risen Lord Jesus also brings us back to God (the Father) (I Pet 3:18). We come to God the Father **through** Him (John 14:8). As our advocate and intercessor, He pleads for us and our justification before the Father (Rom. 8:31-34; I John 2:1-2). By virtue of His ongoing intercession on our behalf, we can approach God the Father **through** Him (Heb. 7:25). **Through** Jesus we are able to present to God (the Father) Spirit-produced offerings that are acceptable and well-pleasing to Him (I Pet. 2:6; Heb. 13:15-16). Since Christ is the one and only mediator between God (the Father) and humankind, the church prays for the world together with Him (I Tim. 2:1-6). The church therefore gives thanks to God the Father and glorifies Him²⁴ **though** the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:8; 7:25; 16:27; II Cor. 1:20; Col. 3:17; I Pet. 4:11; Jude 25).

The God-ward work of Jesus as our high priest and mediator is most evident in His teaching on prayer and our practice of prayer. By giving us the Lord's Prayer, His own prayer in which He intercedes for us and the whole world, Jesus includes us in His filial relationship with the Father and in His intercession for the world.²⁵ He gives His prayer and His praying to us. When we pray this prayer, we stand in the shoes of Jesus the Son and pray to the Father together with Him. This is the reason why He gave the name Father to His disciples as the proper name for the first person of the Trinity (John 17:6, 26). In John's Gospel Jesus also teaches His disciples about this gift, by authorizing them to pray to the Father **in His name** (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; cf. Eph. 5:20). Luther explains the significance of this most vividly in his sermon on John 16:19-24:

Christ prayed for me, and for this reason my prayers are acceptable through His. Accordingly, we must weave our praying into His. He is forever the Mediator for all men. Through Him we come to God. In Him we must incorporate and envelop all our prayers and all that we do. As St. Paul declares (Rom 13:14), we must put on Christ; and everything must be done in Him (1 Cor. 10:31) if it is to be pleasing to God. But all this is said to Christians for the purpose of giving them the boldness and the confidence to rely on this Man and to pray with complete assurance; for we hear that in this way He unites us with Himself, really puts us on a par with Him, and merges our praying into his and His into ours What greater honor could be paid us than this, that our faith in Christ entitles us to be called His brethren and coheirs, that our prayer is to be like His, that there is really no difference

²⁴ See the use of ancient doxology in the Communion Service: "Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place, and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen" (LBW 71, 91, 112; LHS 72).

²⁵ See Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 87-89.

except that our prayers must originate in Him and be spoken in His name if they are to be acceptable and if He is to bestow this inheritance and glory on us. Aside from this, He makes us equal to Himself in all things; His and our prayer must be one, just as His body is ours and His members are ours. (AE 24:407)

Since Christ is our intercessor, we pray together with him. Hence, normally,²⁶ our prayers are addressed to the first person of the Holy Trinity.²⁷ That, too, is why we end our prayers by saying: “through Jesus Christ our Lord” or “in the name of Jesus.”²⁸ In prayer we come to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16, 26-27; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 5:15-20). Prayer depends on the ongoing priestly work of Christ; it involves us in a Trinitarian enactment.²⁹

The order by which the triune God reaches out to us and includes us in the life and work of the Holy Trinity is summed up by a simple creedal formulation in I Corinthians 8:6.³⁰ There Paul says: “For us (there is) only one God, the Father, from whom (are) all things and to whom we (are), and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (are) all things and through whom we (are).” Here the prepositions are significant. On the one hand, everything—and that includes us as creatures and as children of God—comes from the Father and returns to Him. On the other hand, all creatures exist, and we too exist, through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The Father creates and regenerates us through the Son, who brings us back to the Father.

The exalted Christ therefore holds a unique office over against God the Father and over against the church. In that office He is “under” the Father and “over” us. He occupies a unique position within the working order of the triune God, in the church and the world, for the duration of this age. That position derives from His status as the only begotten Son of God, the one who is from the Father, with the Father, and in the Father’s bosom (John 1:1-2, 14, 18). In the descending order of God’s working, Jesus brings the Father and His gifts out to us; in the ascending order Jesus brings us and our offerings together with Him back to the Father.

²⁶ The Council of Hippo went so far as to decree that liturgical prayer was to be offered to God the Father.

²⁷ See Joseph Jungmann, *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer* (London and Dublin: Chapman, 1965). We may, of course, pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, since they too are divine. But even when we do pray to them in the divine service, we do so in a Trinitarian way by ending the prayer with the clause: “for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit/Son, one God, now and for ever.”

²⁸ It therefore makes no sense to pray to Jesus in the name of Jesus as is often done, even though it is quite proper to address Him in prayer.

²⁹ See *A Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 77.

³⁰ See Thüsing, 225-32.

CONCLUSION

Well then, is the exalted Christ in any way subordinate to the Father right now? The answer is both “yes” and “no”. It all depends on whether we are speaking about Him in His nature as God, or about Him in his office as the exalted Son of God. On the one hand, He is not subordinate to the Father in His divine essence, status, and majesty. On the other hand, He is, I hold, subordinate to the Father in His vice-regal office and His work as prophet, priest, and king. He is operationally subordinate to the Father. In the present operation of the triune God in the church and the world, He is the mediator between God the Father and humankind. The exalted Christ receives everything from His Father to deliver to us, so that in turn, He can bring us back to the Father. To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

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JUSTIFICATION AND PREACHING*

Reginald C. Quirk

A little bit about where I come from. To be a Lutheran in Britain is to be a rarity indeed. For complex historical reasons, largely concerned with the marital difficulties of King Henry VIII, the established Protestant Church in England has existed independently of the European mainland since the Reformation. Since the 18th. century denominations of all sorts of other confessions have been tolerated, and Methodists, Baptists, Reformed, Quakers, and more recently Pentecostals have all established themselves, but Lutheranism never really took off in that land. It was superficially too similar to the Church of England to exercise any immediate appeal, but too different in reality for the Church of England to constitute a genuine alternative to that of the Augustana. So various immigrant groups have for a time established Lutheran congregations worshipping in their native languages, but these fade away with the generation that speaks and thinks more readily in English. And a Lutheran body with mission aspirations, such as the one I belong to, seems bent on an anomalous and perverse quest. We are, at present, fourteen congregations, spread throughout the land, and even beyond into the Celtic fringes of Wales and Scotland. We also have a small house of Lutheran studies, a little seminary of disproportionate grandeur to the church itself. And there it is one of my responsibilities to teach homiletics, the craft of preaching, to students preparing for the ministry of our church and of partner churches from various countries.

One group of students is of particular interest in considering the topic of this paper. For in recent years a number of students with a common experience have presented themselves for training in the ministry of our church. These are men from other denominational backgrounds, who have been students of theology at university and there have discovered Luther. They have developed an admiration for the man, and especially for his theology. Like him, they understand the Holy Scriptures to be God's way of revelation to us, and they appreciate the great hermeneutical key he offers us by dividing Law and Gospel, and they recognize the Gospel in a purer form than they had ever known it. From discovering Luther to seeking Lutheranism is a small step, and before long they have wanted to explore a vocation to minister the word of God in the service of the Lutheran Church.

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Any suspicion of ulterior motive is quickly dispelled as it is explained to them that our church may well be in no position to pay them a salary. But this is the church where they feel at home. In particular, by the way, they tend to observe that they never thought it was possible for a church at the same time to believe in the inspiration of Scripture, as the Evangelicals do, and to hold a high regard for the sacraments as the Catholics do. Those comparisons need a little straightening out, but one knows what they mean.

It is these men who have taught me what is distinctive about “Lutheran” preaching. For the application of our confession takes time to mature. Put another way, old habits die hard, and it takes a while for the belief to feed through into practice. Their early attempts at sermons are often very different from the efforts of those who have grown up in Lutherdom. And here I think I have discovered what is most distinctive about Lutheran preaching. It is this: for the Lutheran, the verb “to preach” is a transitive verb. I mean it has a direct object. Ask a Lutheran, “what do you preach?” and he might say, “I preach the Word”, “I preach law and Gospel”, “I preach Jesus Christ and him crucified”, or even “I preach a particular text.” But ask one of these newer converts, “What do you preach?” and they are confused. They may say, “I preach sermons”, but that is a tautology, and tells you nothing, for a sermon is simply what comes out of the preacher’s mouth, it is inevitably implied in the word “preach”. So instead, a preposition creeps in. “What are you preaching?” “I’m preaching **about** compassion”, for example, or “I’m preaching **on** the theme of repentance”, or “I am preaching **against** greed.” Which might all seem to be a rather trivial little observation, but actually I think it reveals a profound difference in the way that the preacher regards himself and his task.

It is a key feature of Lutheran proclamation, that the preacher acknowledges an obligation to a specific source, and therefore to a particular content. For we understand the preacher to stand, at the command of God, between the word and the people. In respect of each he has a solemn duty. With regard to God he is servant and representative. There is no legitimate preaching outside of the call of God. Just as “every high priest chosen from among men”, according to the letter to the Hebrews, “is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God”, and “does not take the honour upon himself, but is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Heb. 5:1,4), so the preacher is appointed to a specific task and a specific message—not to say what takes his fancy, but to deliver the message of God. “For what we preach is not ourselves,” as St Paul said, “but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (II Cor. 4:5).

So with respect to the Word, he is a preacher of the Word. It is unthinkable for a Lutheran pastor to stand before the congregation without a text to expound. Since this is uniquely where God speaks to us, we have

nothing to say apart from the Word. Primarily, of course, we proclaim the incarnate Word, for in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son (Heb. 1:1). But that message is mediated through prophet and apostle, who spoke to us in many and various ways of old, before the incarnation, and whose voice was granted one last extravagant finale in the New Testament to reveal the meaning of God's reconciling work in Christ. Sometimes in the New Testament, the verb "to preach" is used intransitively, especially in the Synoptic Gospels to describe the activity of Jesus or His apostles in a particular place. Mostly, though, it is used transitively, and overwhelmingly the object is the same thing. In 44 of the 78 examples in the English New Testament (in the RSV version), what is preached is the Gospel or the Good News, either as the object of κηρύσσω, or because it is contained in the choice of the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι. Of the others sixteen are references to preaching Christ, six to preaching the Word, four to preaching the Kingdom of God, four to preaching Baptism, one to preaching the forgiveness of sins, one to preaching peace, one to preaching the faith, and one to preaching circumcision, or more precisely to **not** preaching circumcision.

And herein lies the preacher's responsibility to the people. They have called him for this purpose, to proclaim the Word, incarnate and inspired, by which God makes Himself and His dealings with us known. A congregation is cheated if they are served less than this. Furthermore, there is a precise goal entailed in the New Testament activity of preaching. Never does it speak of preaching the Law. As close as it gets is Paul's reference to his not preaching circumcision (Gal. 5:11). And if one looks at this statement in Galatians 5, the whole point Paul is making is that he **does** preach Christ and the Gospel. New Testament preaching is preaching of Christ, and consequently of the Gospel, and its corollaries, the forgiveness of sins, peace, the kingdom of God, Baptism and faith.

Preaching of the Gospel comes uniquely from God's revealed Word. The Gospel is not written on the human heart. There is no way it could be conceived even by the most vivid imagination. Consequently the most faithful preaching of the word tends to be genuinely evangelical. The further the homily drifts from the exposition of the sacred text, the more likely it is to be legalistic.

I very much want to concur with the comments made by Dr Wenz yesterday in response to "indigenization and contextualization" of Scripture, and the danger of opening the way for "another gospel", as St Paul puts it in Galatians 1:6-8. The text must address us, master us, form us, and we can only submit to it and not stand as master over it. But there is an individualization of the text that is proper, and indeed inevitable, when it is allowed to speak to us. It is, again to reiterate Dr Wenz's terms, "effective and performative". The Word of God is living and active (Heb. 4:12)—the

incarnate Word, of course, but also the inspired Word that mediates Christ to us. It accomplishes the thing which God purposes, and prospers in the thing for which it is sent (Is. 55:11). And it is sent into the ears and the hearts of the individual, the Law to kill, and the Gospel to create faith and bestow life. In this respect there is a “reader response”—not a licence to make of the text what we will, but a response created by the Holy Spirit, through the text, calling and enlightening me by the Gospel.

To make this thesis explicit in the terms of my title, “justification and preaching”, the one of those items is the object of the other. Biblical preaching is preaching justification.

This, I contend, is a fact, but not a self-evident truth. The understanding of preaching as an activity primarily concerned with the exposition of the Law is commonplace. A reasonable gauge of this is uncovered in the entry for the verb “preach” in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, the standard reference of English usage in Britain. The entry covers several nuances of the word, but whenever any content is suggested, it is consistently in terms of law orientation of the message. For example, “to utter an earnest exhortation, especially moral or religious”, and “to exhort people to some act or practice”, and “to give moral and religious advice in an obtrusive and tiresome way”. Clearly the word has negative associations in this latter usage, and who can wonder at it, if the message, far from being focused on the heartening news of our salvation as it is in the New Testament, is rather confined to pious tirades about our duties. Experience shows how readily this can be the case. The chief virtue sought in a sermon among many circles is that it be **relevant**. To be relevant means to have a place in my day by day life, and especially to change my conduct in my day to day life. Many a pulpit becomes the platform for political and social exhortations, for pangs to the conscience and a call to action. The old man rejoices in this approach, because it lets him live. Rather than being annihilated by the theological thrust of the holy and uncompromising law of God, the old man is flattered that he can try his best and do his bit. So not only does the Shorter Oxford preachment choose the wrong facet of the Law/Gospel dichotomy to focus on, it also most naturally misrepresents the Law as a recipe for life rather than for death.

Of course, it might be argued that such sermons are not preaching justification, because they are preaching to the justified. Once saved, the individual must be led on, and shown the consecrated life of the child of God. And this is necessary; but my question is, is it preaching, at least as the New Testament conceives it? In fact I will propose a different liturgical setting in which this exhortation more naturally belongs, an alternative to the pulpit. But first of all to answer the rhetorical question, “is it preaching?” No, it is not authentic preaching. The Swedish bishop, or if I may honour

him rather with the title pastor, Bo Giertz, wrote: “The meaning of the sermon is not to bring the priestly office of the believers into realization. The sermon, rather, exercises the prophetic office of Christ. Preaching comes through the word of Christ, and for that reason brings forth faith.”¹ When he says it does not bring the priestly office of the believers into realization, he does not thereby deny that there is such an office. But the sermon, he insists, exercises the prophetic office of Christ. Surely it means that, as I suppose we would say that the Eucharist exercises our Lord’s priestly office, Himself the victim and himself the priest, so the sermon declares His prophetic Word, Himself the prophet and Himself the message—the incarnate Word. It proclaims Christ.

By this, the last paper of a symposium targeting the theme of justification, I would guess that it has by now been established that justification is a good thing. Is it possible, in preaching, to have too much of that good thing? Could there be too much preaching of justification? Might the focus on justification be so relentless that other worthy themes become neglected? These questions bring me to the heart of my concern as one called to teach the craft of sermon making. And the answer I must give to each of those questions is no, justification cannot be over-preached, so long as it is properly and fully understood.

The danger is of understanding justification too narrowly. If there is a criticism of some of the homiletics textbooks of the last century, perhaps it is this. By confining the conception of justification to the forgiveness of sins alone, other aspects of the Gospel could be neglected. For where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation, as Luther explained in his Small Catechism dealing with the benefit of the Lord’s Supper. And this narrow view can lead to a lesser variety of legalism, namely the primacy of the Law theme. This I will attempt to explain. But first let me backtrack a bit to establish a few assumptions about Lutheran preaching.

Firstly, we understand it to be textual preaching. Every sermon is drawn out of the study of a particular text or texts of scripture. Ordinarily these texts are not drawn from the imagination of the preacher, who may have his own pet themes to pursue, but from the church’s lectionary, a safeguard against subjectivity, and for the preservation of the balanced cycle of the liturgical year. Furthermore, I work on the assumption that each sermon has a central point. So the chief idea is identified in the text to serve as the theme around which the sermon develops. This is important if the congregation is to follow the exposition. Ordinary rules of conversation allow us to meander from one point to the next. Each person in turn says something that is in

¹ Giertz, Bo, “The Meaning and Task of the Sermon in the Framework of the Liturgy”, in *The Unity of the Church: A Symposium* (Augustana Book Concern, 1957).

some way related to the thing previously said, perhaps thereby opening the way for a new tack when the former speaker responds. So an unpredictable path unfolds, and before long the speakers may be asking the question, “how did we get on to this topic?” But this will not work in preaching. Disengaged from participation to steer the conversation, the hearers will be frustrated and soon lost if the preacher wanders off along his own stream of consciousness. Well-structured presentations introduce a single theme and stick to it, not, of course, by slavishly repeating the same thought in different words, but by keeping everything related to that point. So the structure resembles a spoked wheel, with the central point at its hub, and the whole sermon related to it, as opposed to the discourse which would be represented rather as a rambling pathway joining up seemingly random ideas.

But how is that central thought to be selected from several that might suggest themselves in the text? Often, it is obvious, because the text itself makes it clear. There may be an explicit punch-line: “So the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”, or “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” But often the preacher must choose where his focus will be. And the greatest challenge for the exegete can be to identify the chief thought of the text.

My point is that goal-driven preaching tends to identify an aspect of the Law as the theme. It does not follow that the sermon contains no Gospel, or that it does not reach its high point in the great truth of justification. Many of us were encouraged to plan the sermon in terms of goal, malady, and means. Typically the goal would be the life or faith outcome suggested by the text. The malady would be the contrary behaviour or attitude, presented in such a way that the hearers are confronted with their own sins and shortcomings. The means to move from how things are to how things should be, from malady to goal, is justification. The sin is forgiven and the new life is empowered. And that is wonderful. Two points out of three deal with the Law—namely the malady and the life-goal—but the means is pure Gospel. The problem is that it is always the same aspect of Gospel. Essentially the same sermon is preached every week, with a different sin and a different sanctified outcome substituted by the particular flavour of the text. A sin is identified and the Law accuses, forgiveness is announced in Christ, the believer’s life is empowered to bear the appropriate fruits befitting repentance in this particular case.

Consider a few texts, to demonstrate the approach in action. Luke 17:11-19 relates the healing of the ten lepers. One cannot fail to be impressed by the contrast that is drawn between the thoughtless, self-absorbed ingratitude of the nine, and the exemplary humble thankfulness of that lone Samaritan. Were not ten cleansed, where are the nine? Need one look further for malady or goal? Application is simple: do our own lives even achieve 10% gratitude? For every ten blessings we receive, do we remember to return

thanks for even one? The Gospel is equally self-evident to us: Christ has died for this sin, and in Him we find forgiveness. The conclusion, then, is that we are enabled to live a life of gratitude in Him.

Another text, randomly selected. Romans 13:1-7 concerns the earthly authorities and our responsibilities to them. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities", it begins, and again we need look no further for the malady and goal. The Law exposes our deficiencies in citizenship and subjection to authority. The Gospel is again equally self-evident to us: Christ has died for this sin, and in Him we find forgiveness. The conclusion, then, that we are enabled to live a life of enhanced citizenship.

One more text. Acts 1:8 is that verse so favoured by missionary preachers: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." We are readily aware of our shortcomings as witnesses to Christ, and here is our malady. The Gospel is again equally self-evident to us: Christ has died for this sin, and in Him we find forgiveness. The conclusion, then, is that we are enabled to live a life of more committed witness.

Three reasonable sermons, each with justification at its heart. But it is, at the point of the Gospel, the same sermon. And this impoverishes the Gospel because it conceives it too narrowly. The application of the Law is refreshed each time, but the only variety in the Gospel is in the particular metaphors that convey it. But there is more to the Gospel in the broader sense than that. In its most inclusive understanding, the Gospel includes all that God in His love does for us. At the top of that list is our redemption in Christ, but the list goes on. Some of what God does for us is in the area of the first article of the creed, in the sphere of creation and provision. Some of what God does for us belongs to the third article and the work of sanctification, the Spirit's calling by the Gospel and enlightening with His gifts in the fellowship of the church.

If the preacher, rather than looking for the distinctive aspect of the Law offered in the text, seeks the central point of Gospel in the text, he will discover fresh perspectives on the rich diversity of God's blessings. Let us consider again the three texts. The chief element of Gospel in the healing of the ten lepers is the unconditional love of God, even towards the ungrateful. Were not ten healed? St Paul expressed this by explaining how God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). And this is a comforting dimension of the Gospel indeed. There is Law to be preached here, but actually the admonition of the Law is not related to the sin of ingratitude, but the dangerous belief that we in any way earn the love and the healing of God.

Turning to the Romans 13 text, the principle work of God for us there is in the provision of the rule of the left hand. His gift is government and the good order that proceeds from it. That it is a wonderful gift of God can only be doubted by someone who has never tasted anarchy. When does this emphasis get to be preached, if the goal-directed approach diverts us immediately to the sin of disobedience? Again there is Law to be preached, perhaps in the sin of not recognizing that those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.

Or what of Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8, "You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and so on"? I chose this one because in this case looking for the life-goal in it can lead to an error in interpretation. When Jesus announced to His apostles that they were to be His witnesses, He used a technical term that in the Acts of the Apostles² (as opposed to its use in church parlance today) refers to the eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus. It is really stretching that meaning to apply it to our own witness. But the Gospel, the thing that God does for us in this text, is to provide His apostolic witness, which still makes known the resurrection to the very ends of the earth in our day, as we read their testimony in the pages of the New Testament. The admonition of the Law related to this is not failure in witness, but failure to appreciate and use this gift.

The Law is to be preached, but as the servant of the Gospel. If the Law themes the sermon, it determines the application of the Gospel. If the Gospel themes the sermon, it opens up the breadth of God's care. Does this suggest that justification should not be the heart and focus of preaching? No, rather that you cannot divide the Gospel. To proclaim the God who forgives sin is also to proclaim the God who gives daily bread, who made me and all my members, who richly and daily provides. To know Him only as the solution to our guilt is not fully to know Him, or really to know Him at all.

Indeed, the term **justification** should not be viewed so narrowly. St Paul, who is the biblical writer who has brought the term to the forefront of our theology, does not speak of this gift in isolation from the many corollaries that follow from it. For example, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1); "Since, therefore, we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9); "And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30); "We might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Tit. 3:7). You cannot separate justification from peace, or justification from salvation,

² E.g. Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 22:20.

or from glorification or from eternal life. All of these belong to the Gospel, and the Gospel must not be torn apart.

In the notes to his translation of Schmidt's doctrinal essay read at the first convention of the Synodical Conference, Kurt Marquart observes:

Behind this [Lutheran] mode of teaching there stands the language of the Luther Bible, and Luther's grand equations: Grace equals forgiveness equals justification equals redemption equals reconciliation equals propitiation. These are *theological* not *philological* equivalents. Of course the *words* "propitiation," "redemption," and the rest, mean different things—but they refer to the same *theological reality*, though from different angles or aspects of it. This is not scholarly carelessness on Luther's part, but pastoral meat-and-potatoes orientation. Impatient with everything frilly and pedantic, Luther concentrates massively on the Gospel essentials—and with him the Lutheran Church.³

I am indebted to my colleague, Glen Zweck, for tracking down references in the Lutheran confessions to show how many of these terms are there used interchangeably and synonymously. For example in paragraph 76 of article IV of the Apology we read, "Forgiveness of sins is the same as justification", and in paragraphs 79 and 158 of the same article, "our idle opponents quibble as to whether forgiveness of sins and infusion of grace are the same thing", and "Justification is reconciliation for Christ' sake". Article 3 (paragraph 4) of the Solid Declaration affirms, "as God and man he has by his perfect obedience redeemed us from our sins, justified and saved us. Therefore they (that is the teachers of the Augsburg Confession) maintained that the righteousness of faith is the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the fact that we are adopted." The same article later picks up the theme:

we unanimously reject and condemn ... the following ... errors as contrary to the Word of God, the teaching of the prophets and apostles and our Christian faith ... that when the prophets and apostles speak of the righteousness of faith, the words "to justify" and "to be justified" do not mean "to absolve from sins" and "to receive forgiveness of sins".⁴

Furthermore, not only does the concept of justification embrace many images, metaphors and facets, but it cannot be severed from any aspect of the Gospel. Whenever we speak of God's love and grace in any of its

³ Marquart, K., *Justification—Objective And Subjective: A Translation of the Doctrinal Essay Read at the First Convention of the Synodical Conference in 1872* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 1982).

⁴ Tappert, T. G., trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 117, 129, 540, and 550; quoted by Zweck, G., *Augsburg Confession: 30 Bible Studies*, (Cambridge: Westfield House, 1994), 35.

infinite manifestations, we are tugging on a thread that is interwoven with justification.

J. A. O. Preus in his article “Justification by Faith: The *Articulus Stantis et Cadentis Ecclesiae*” (the article by which the church stands or falls) speaks of justification not only as the centre of all articles but also of each article. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther wrote: “As I often emphasize, the doctrine of justification must be diligently observed. In it are involved all other articles of our faith, and so long as justification is properly taught, it will be well with all other doctrines also.”⁵ Explaining this comment, Dr Preus writes,

What he is trying to express here seems to go beyond merely stating that justification by faith is the centre of all other articles in terms of their relation to it. That of course is true enough. However, Luther is suggesting that the relationship between the *Hauptartikel* and the other articles is even closer than that. “In it are involved all other articles of our faith.” The article of justification is more than the hub of a wheel which supports all the others, more than a hinge upon which the others hang. The other articles are involved in it and it is involved in them.”⁶

Yesterday, Rev. Preus (Daniel Preus this time) explored this theme fully for us. He explained that the person of Jesus is the one aspect of the Christian faith apart from which none of the rest can be understood. It is unique in this respect, and all theology is, therefore, Christology. This was powerfully demonstrated in his eleven statements, each one inevitably linking an aspect of the faith to the name and the person of Jesus. It was demonstrated again in a *via negativa* by Luther’s refrain of condemnation of sundry heresies in the Schmalkald Articles, with the claim “it is in contradiction to the central article”. In summary, he said, “to talk about justification is to talk about Christ; to talk about Christ is to talk about justification.” To take justification out of the picture is to empty every other article of the faith. But there is an inverse to this: to remove any other article of the faith is to understate the Gospel.

What this means for preaching is that each aspect of the Gospel needs to be viewed in the light of justification. Each naturally connects to this, the heart of God’s dealings with us. It means that justification does not need to be forced into the sermon, for where the Gospel in any guise is found, justification is waiting to be uncovered.

⁵ AE 26:283; WA 40¹:441.

⁶ Preus, J. A. O., III, “Justification by Faith: The *Articulus Stantis et Cadentis Ecclesiae*”, in Krispin, G. S., and Vieker, J. D., eds, *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (1990), 270-71.

I suppose that everyone on whom even a modicum of psychology has been inflicted will be familiar with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.⁷ Maslow posited a pyramid configuration to explain that in order to appreciate the higher aspects of humanity, like love and "self-actualization", one must build upon the basic physiological demands—food, warmth, security, and so on. And that is why, we are told, you cannot give the Gospel to a starving man; you must feed him first before he is able to receive it. This is in curious contrast to our Lord's example. Confronted by a paralysed man dropped through the roof, He simply said, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5). Apparently only as an afterthought did He finally say, "Rise, take up your pallet and walk" (Mk 2:9). Confronted by a dying criminal on the cross beside Him, bereft of any physiological needs or security, Jesus offered him nothing besides the justification He was at that moment accomplishing, and the promise, "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

The doctrine of justification turns Maslow's pyramid on its apex. Only in the light of our justification can there be any place for the other, complementary richness of God's benevolence. Be it good government, faithful pastors, pious spouse, a steak and a beer in the company of good friends—who can enjoy these blessings as we do, who know the love of God in Christ, and who live in the security that if this night our soul should be required of us, through the saving merits of Christ we too shall be with Him in paradise? So justification is the foundation of preaching—not one possible conclusion, not the end point, but the basis.

I left unanswered earlier a question about the place of the Law in preaching. The Law always functions according to its theological use: *lex semper accusat*. In preaching the Law is the pedagogue of the Gospel, preparing the way for the Good News of salvation by showing our lost and condemned state. The Law can never function to motivate the sinner to live better, for this power exists only in the work of God and therefore only in the Gospel. So we are summoned and enabled to walk in newness of life. There is much discussion, however, about how the Law can inform the believer. Few would argue that the Christian, who would delight in doing the will of God, would not be well advised to seek it in the Scriptures. Does this insight not also have its place in preaching? This question touches upon the issue of the third use of the Law. I would concede that such teaching can have its place in the pulpit, although I maintain that this is not what is called preaching in the New Testament. But there is another option.

The Christian life is adorned with good works, but these are not the works of the Christian, they are the work of God. St Paul recognized this

⁷ Maslow, A., *Motivation and personality* (Harper and Row, 1970).

fact in his own life, and credited God appropriately: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me” (I Cor. 15:10). It therefore seems fruitless to demand the works of the sanctified life from people. Since they are the work of God, do we not seek them from God? This we do, facing the altar, bringing the supplications of the people before our Lord. What seems unnatural in preaching feels comfortable in prayer. Take, for example the collect for this coming Sunday: “Merciful Father, since you have given your only Son as the sacrifice for our sin, also **give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way.**” Or from the collect two weeks later: “Bring forth in us the fruit of good works”. In the prayer of the church these requests may become much more specific, asking for particular virtues in our lives, or outcomes in our conduct, but always recognizing that we seek the works of God. Put like that, it sounds like a manifestation of the Gospel more than a third use of the Law.

I thank you for your patience with my ramblings. I am not a theoretician on this subject, just someone who preaches week by week, and reflects on the task in trying to help students in it. My advice to them is: search the text, find the Gospel, know your people, and bring them (Gospel and people) together. That is how I hope they will learn preaching justification.

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THE GENERAL ABSOLUTION IN LIGHT OF THE NÜRNBERG CONTROVERSY*

Thomas M. Winger

The invitation to present a brief essay to this conference indicated that we were free to offer any research in which we were currently involved. I think this is a great idea, and, in fact, I made this suggestion in Erfurt three years ago. After all, we are not just teachers of theology but theologians who actively probe, test, confirm, and critique the theology and practice of our church on the basis of Holy Scripture, the Book of Concord, and the traditions and writings of our fathers in the faith.

Nonetheless, you may be somewhat surprised to see an essay on worship presented in this context. For we tend to see worship as a practical subject, not a research discipline. But this was not the way of our forefathers, who spoke of *Liturgik* as a discipline of dogmatics. Prosper of Aquitaine's oft-cited dictum *lex orandi—lex credendi* indicates at the very least that the way we worship both flows from what we believe and affects what we believe. Lutherans worship as Lutherans, or they cease to be Lutheran. I could easily fill the hour by tracing this idea through our Book of Concord, pursuing the thesis that the Reformation was all about worship for the very reason that it was all about justification by grace through faith. But instead of pursuing that ambitious plan, I offer a case study in liturgical theology.

Quite recently our sister church, the LCMS, published its long-awaited new hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book* (2006). For almost ten years I served on the project's liturgy committee, representing both Lutheran Church–Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England. And I can attest from the inside that the proper distinction of Law and Gospel and the centrality of Jesus Christ were of the highest priority in every decision made. Take, for instance, the long-standing liturgical practice of offering a general absolution in response to a general confession at the beginning of the Divine Service.

This practice is not without its critics, and is indeed not universal throughout Lutheranism. In fact, one of the first criticisms against the new hymnal that appeared in print was the charge that it violated both our Lutheran theology and our liturgical tradition by absolving the entire congregation in the words, "I forgive you all your sins". One critic wrote

* Based on work done for the LCMS Lutheran Hymnal Project which led to *Lutheran Service Book* (2006), this essay was presented in a sectional to the Third ILC World Seminaries Conference, Pretoria, South Africa, 1 April 2007.

that we who defend “Closed Communion” were guilty of practising “Open Absolution”! So where did this come from, and why do we do it? Does it imply that everyone present is forgiven, regardless of the state of their heart, whether they are truly penitent or not? Does it offer forgiveness even to the unbaptized visitor? Does it imply that our confessional commitment to retain Private Confession and Absolution is a dead letter?

To help you understand the process by which the hymnal project addressed these questions, let me begin with the historical question. Here it is necessary to distinguish between the general confession and the general absolution, for they have not always gone hand in hand. The general confession is, in fact, a pre-Reformation practice, found in two forms.

Firstly, there was a sort of “clerical” pattern, which began in mediaeval monasteries. In their morning and evening prayer services, monks would regularly confess their sins to one another as way of healing their community through the Gospel. Sometimes called the *Confiteor* (“I confess”) pattern, this reciprocal confession is preserved in the service of Compline in *Lutheran Worship* (1982) and *Lutheran Service Book* (2006). This ritual was soon adapted by priests and their assistants as a rite of preparation before they conducted the mass. They would confess to one another in the sacristy or at the step of the altar before the service began with the Introit. When in the 13th century priests began to add an absolution to the rite, they would very often direct their words beyond their assistants to the entire congregation, either declaring the grace of God or saying more directly, “I absolve you [all].” The people were drawn into the priest’s preparation.

A second pattern of confession began more intentionally as a congregational act. Although the Western liturgy was in Latin throughout the Middle Ages, it was quite common to have the sermon and prayers in the vernacular. As early as the 10th century the priest would remain in the pulpit to lead the people in an *Offene Schuld* (“public confession”) in response to the sermon and in preparation for the Sacrament. Because of this location, it was uncommon to have an actual absolution. The people confessed their sins, and then received absolution through Christ’s sacramental gifts of His Body and Blood.

Lutherans in the 16th century inherited both forms of public confession. Most early Lutheran Church Orders direct the **ministers** to conduct a form of the *Confiteor* at the beginning of the service, but it is rare to find the congregation involved. The *Offene Schuld* after the sermon was also widely practised, and was by definition a congregational act. But keep in mind that it was very rarely followed by a spoken absolution. Luther’s German Mass (1525), for instance, transformed this confessional act into an exhortation to

communicants based on the Lord's Prayer (AE 53:80). But the response was not a general absolution but the Sacrament itself.

Jump forward five hundred years to the new LCMS hymnal, and one finds both continuity and discontinuity with this tradition. Consider for a moment the general confession and absolution located at the beginning of setting three, inherited from the Communion service of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941). After the words of general confession, the pastor responds:

P: Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive You all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

This form of absolution virtually duplicates the language of private Confession and Absolution. Its use of the traditional formula, *ego te absolvo* "I forgive you", has been referred to as "indicative-operative" because by the very act of speaking the forgiveness the gift is given.

In parallel to this pattern setting three offers a rite that concludes not with an "indicative-operative" absolution, but a so-called "declaration of grace".

P: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To them that believe on His name He gives power to become the sons of God and has promised His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Grant this, Lord, unto us all.

C: Amen.

Many pastors in our tradition have misinterpreted this second pattern as if it were intended for non-Communion services (because it was included in *TLH's* Morning Service without Communion). Others have assumed that it is designed for the non-ordained (such as vicars and elders) to read, since it includes no reference to call and ordination. Neither of these interpretations is correct. This form of confession and absolution is, in fact, intended as a genuine alternative to be used by an ordained minister in the Divine Service (with Holy Communion). It simply has a different history, and illustrates the theological disagreement we are about to investigate.

This latter "declaration of grace" pattern actually has a very strong precedent in 16th century Lutheran church orders. It first appears in the 1525 German rite of Andreas Döber in Nürnberg, where it is used at the beginning of the service as a *Confiteor* into which the entire congregation is drawn. It appears again in the Mecklenburg church order of 1552. This seems to be the early source from which the LCMS drew it into their tradition. It serves as the only form of general confession in the service of Holy Communion in

their first English language hymnal, the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnbook* (1912). Remember that we are talking about the “declaration of grace” pattern of confession.

So where did *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) get the “indicative-operative” form of general absolution? It has been recently alleged that it was an innovation, by which the words of private absolution were illegitimately inserted into the public service—but this is far from the truth. In LCMS history, its immediate source was simply the German agenda prepared by C. F. W. Walther himself, as first published in 1856. There in its Communion service we find a general confession of the *Offene Schuld* form, following the sermon, to which the pastor replies with the following words of absolution:

Auf solch euer Bekenntnis verkündige ich euch Allen, die ihr euere Sünden herzlich bereuet, an Jesum Christum glaubet, und den guten ernstlichen Vorsatz habt, durch Beistand Gottes des Heiligen Geistes euer sündliches Leben forthin zu bessern, kraft meines Amtes, als ein berufener und verordneter Diener des Worts, die Gnade Gottes, und vergebe euch an Statt und auf Befehl meines Herrn Jesu Christi alle euere Sünde, im Namen Gottes + des Vaters, Gottes + des Sohnes, Gottes + des Heiligen Geistes. Amen

Upon this your confession I announce to all of you, who heartily repent of your sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and have the quite serious intention from now on to improve your sinful life, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of God [I announce] the grace of God, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of God the + Father, God the + Son, and God + the Holy Spirit. Amen

This absolution was not only brought into the Communion service of *TLH* (and subsequent hymnals), but also found its way into the Order of the Confessional Service (p. 48). Here it was divided into two parts, such that the “condition of penitence” was posed as a question to the congregation, followed by the absolution itself.

The Communion service of *TLH* truncated it farther, providing only the absolution itself, though retaining the catchall phrase “upon this your confession”. Clearly, however, it was not the editors of *TLH* who first made this revision. For I have discovered this exact form of general absolution in the *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in Australia* (1914).¹

If we set aside the precise wording of this absolution, we find even earlier origins for this “indicative-operative” absolution. Fred Precht asserted that it

¹ p. 7, located after the sermon.

came from the Saxony church order of 1581.² This is mistaken: the Saxon church order (of 1580, not 1581) on which the LCMS agenda was based, has no *Confiteor* at the beginning, and simply used Luther's confessional paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer after the sermon. However, Precht's footnote is correct, pointing to Sehling's collection of *Kirchenordnungen*, vol. 1, p. 557. Here we find a rite of confession and absolution from the Hofkirche of Dresden, 1581. According to Sehling, it was introduced at the prince's request, and prepared by the pastors of the Hofkirche. Though not universally used in Saxony, it was reproduced elsewhere, such as in Leipzig, 1601. It is likely, therefore, that Walther brought it into the LCMS Agenda from one of these earlier local traditions.³

This reference, however, even when corrected, does not yet take us to the earliest source. For this we need to pause and consider the story of the Nürnberg Controversy. In 1533 a dispute broke out in Lutheran free city of Nürnberg over the use of a general absolution in the divine service.⁴ It had long been the practice to use a form of *Offene Schuld* "public confession and absolution" following the sermon, leading into the Lord's Supper. This included an admonition, similar to what Luther had sketched out in his German Mass (1526), followed by a general absolution. An absolution composed by the Lutheran pastor Wenceslaus Link had been in common use in Nürnberg:⁵

² *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), p. 403.

³ It is interesting that the conditional words "Allen, die ihr euer Sünden herzlich bereuet, an JESum Christum glaubet, und den guten ernstlichen Vorsatz habt, durch Beistand Gottes des Heiligen Geistes euer sündliches Leben forthin zu bessern" are not found in the Dresden original. Did Walther add them because of certain misgivings over the public absolution? Or do they derive from another source?

⁴ A brief treatment is found in Joel Brondos, 'Public Absolution', *Logia* 4.2 (April 1995): 76-77. See also Bernhard Klaus, 'Die Rüstgebete', in *Leitourgia: Handbuch des Evangelischen Gottesdienstes* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1953), 2:553-55; Theodore Jungkuntz, 'Private Confession: A 20th-Century Issue Seen from a 16th-Century Perspective', *CTM* 39.2 (Feb. 1968); also Gottfried Krodell's introduction in *AE* 50:75-76. For a fuller investigation see Bernhard Klaus, *Veit Dietrich: Leben und Werk* (Nürnberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1958), particularly the chapter, 'Der Streit um die offene Schuld', pp. 147-68; and Dietrich Stollberg, 'Osiander und der Nürnberger Absolutionsstreit', *Lutherische Blätter* 86 (1965): 153-68. According to Jungkuntz, 'Klaus emphasizes the "Lutheran" defeat of Osiandrian extremes, whereas Stollberg points up the positive contribution made by Osiander toward a theology of the care of souls and a systematic Lutheran treatment of absolution" (110 n. 14).

⁵ Cited by Bernhard Klaus, "Die Rüstgebete", in *Leitourgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, ed. K. F. Müller and W. Blankenburg (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1955), 2:553.

Und dieweil wir alle gesündigt haben und der Gnade Gottes bedürfen, so demütigt eure Herzen vor Gott dem Herrn, bekennet eure Sünden und Gebrechen mit herzlicher Liebe und Begierde seiner göttlichen Gnade und Hilfe, mit festem Glauben und Vertrauen auf sein gnädiges Zusagen, und vergebt von Herzen ein jeder seinem Nächsten, auf daß euch euer himmlischer Vater eure Sünd und Missetaten auch vergebe. So ihr solches tut, entbinde ich euch nochmaln anstatt der heiligen christlichen Kirche und aus Befehl und Zusagen unsers Herrn Jesu Christi, da er sprach: Wem ihr die Sünde vergebt, dem sind sie vergeben, von allen euren Sünden, im Namen des Vaters und des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes. Amen

And since we have all sinned and have need of the grace of God, humble your hearts before God the Lord, confess your sins and transgressions with heartfelt love and desire for His divine grace and help, with firm faith and trust in His gracious promise, and let each one forgive his neighbour from the heart, so that your Heavenly Father may also forgive you your sins and misdeeds. Whoever of you does such, I absolve you henceforth in the stead of the holy Christian Church and by the mandate and promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "To whomever you forgive their sin, they are forgiven of all their sins," in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Andreas Osiander, the leading pastor in Nürnberg, had often expressed his dissatisfaction with this practice, believing that it led people to despise and ignore private Confession and Absolution. He believed that private confession was necessary so that the pastor could properly exercise "pastoral jurisdiction"—determining who could receive the Sacrament to their good, and from whom it should be withheld. The city council and a number of other pastors, however, believed that both public and private practices could co-exist. In 1533 Osiander, with the help of Johann Brenz of Württemberg, assembled a new church order for Brandenburg-Nürnberg.⁶ By way of compromise, the church order required personal announcement to the pastor of the desire to receive the Lord's Supper, but left the matter of private Confession and Absolution optional, but highly recommended. At the same time, the public admonition following the sermon was to be retained. When the church order was printed, however, the city council and townspeople were shocked to find that Osiander and Brenz had omitted the Link absolution. With the support of Link and some other city clergy, they demanded that it be reintroduced.

Osiander objected vehemently. He argued that "thieves and crooks" might thereby be absolved of sins that should be retained. The city council

⁶ An overview of the church order may be found in Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 96-98.

appealed to Luther, Melanchthon, and the other Wittenberg theologians for an opinion in a letter dated 8 April 1533.⁷ The letter portrays the dispute as between factions of the clergy, although it is clear that the city council sided against Osiander. They argue that many pious common people do not have the opportunity to attend the Holy Sacrament and private absolution every week. For them the public absolution is a joyful message of the forgiveness of their sins and God's gracious mercy. The withdrawal of the public absolution has caused great unrest and doubt among the people, especially as there are not enough clergy to offer regular private absolution to everyone before receiving the Sacrament. In addition they appeal to the use of public absolution in neighbouring ducal Saxony. What counsel are the Wittenbergers able to offer on the basis of Holy Scripture?

Wittenberg responded on 18 April 1533 in a letter written by Luther and Melanchthon:

To the Honorable and Wise Mayors, and to the Council of the City of Nürnberg, Our Dear Sirs:

God's grace through our Lord Jesus Christ! Honorable, Wise, Dear Sirs! Regarding Your Honors' inquiry, we have discussed this matter among ourselves and do not see that public, general absolution is to be censured or rejected, for the [following] reason[s]:

The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as the gospel itself also proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world and exempts no one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid].

Regarding the idea that no one might desire private absolution if one has public absolution and keeps it in use, we say that this is definitely a weighty issue, [but] that consciences nevertheless are in need of this special comfort. For one has to instruct consciences that the comfort of the gospel is directed to each individual particularly; therefore, as you people who understand these matters know, the gospel has to be applied through Word and sacrament to each individual particularly, so that each individual in his conscience is tossed about by the question whether this great grace, which Christ offers to

⁷ WA Br 6:446-47.

all men, belongs to him too. Under these circumstances it can easily be understood that one is not to abolish private absolution in favor of public absolution; also, this application makes more clear the meaning of the gospel and the power of the keys. For very few people know how to use public absolution or apply it to themselves, unless in addition this application reminds them that they also ought to apply the general absolution to themselves as if it belonged to each individually; for this is the true office and task of the gospel: definitely to forgive sins by grace.

For these reasons we do not consider that general absolution is either to be rejected or to be abolished, but that nevertheless the personal application and [private] absolution should be maintained.

May God always graciously protect Your Honors. We are always ready and willing to serve Your Honors.⁸

Osiander was not convinced. Throughout the summer he continued to attack from the pulpit the use of public absolution. The city council warned him more than once to desist. Finally it was decided that each party of clergy should record their position. The respective “confessions” were sent to Wittenberg for judgement on 27 September 1533.⁹ On 8 October a somewhat lengthy opinion was returned, signed by Luther, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Melancthon, and Cruciger.¹⁰ In it Luther confesses that he had not previously understood Osiander’s position, and that he has now written directly to Osiander appealing for peace.¹¹ Luther still believes that the controversy can be resolved, as both parties are concerned for common edification. He writes:

Although we hold private absolution to be very Christian and comforting, and that it should be maintained in the church (for the reasons that we have written to you before), nevertheless we cannot and do not wish to burden consciences so harshly as if there can be no forgiveness of sins except through private absolution. For holy people from the beginning of the world until the time of Christ did not have *privatam absolutionem*;¹² rather, they had to comfort themselves with the common promise and build their faith upon it. And although David in one instance received private absolution, nevertheless he certainly had other sins, before and after, when he had to cling to the general absolution and preaching, as also Isaiah and others. But now that the Gospel has been revealed, it proclaims the forgiveness of sins generally and individually.

⁸ WA Br 6:454-55; AE 50:75-78.

⁹ See cover letter, WA Br 6:518-21. The messengers carried an honorarium of 100 Taler for the Wittenbergers!

¹⁰ WA Br 6:527-30.

¹¹ WA Br 6:518.

¹² By using the Latin phrase, Luther wishes to refer specifically to the sacramental pattern of private absolution.

What Osiander says is true: The conscience does not struggle as to whether God is merciful in general, but concerning the individual person, whether God wishes to be gracious to me. But although the sermon and the promises are public speech, nevertheless each individual should take note that they are universal, and should not exclude himself from them, but should make them his own, as a Word specifically for him, since God has bidden all to believe His promise. And even if only a few believe, God still holds on to them despite all the others who despise it, as St Paul says in Rom. 3[:3], “Does their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God?” What would the consequences be if there were no forgiveness apart from private absolution? How could one counsel the weak conscience who cannot hear private absolution very often, when it is attacked by terror and fear, not only in inconsequential sins, but also in high and heavy matters? How also should those be comforted who are being swiftly overtaken by death, in the countryside or whatever, when they have no time to get a priest? What of those places where it happens because of persecution of the Gospel that no priest will announce the absolution? That is the sort of perpetual strife that the Christian life and existence is, in which one continually seeks forgiveness against the terrors of sin.

Secondly, we cannot judge otherwise before God than that the common preaching of the Gospel also has the effect that it works the forgiveness of sins in the hearts of those who comfort and lift up their terrified conscience through it. As St Paul says, “The Gospel is a power of God, through which all who believe on it are saved” [Rom. 1:16]; likewise, in II Cor. 3 he calls the Gospel an office of the Holy Spirit that brings life and righteousness; likewise, “faith is from hearing, hearing through the Word of God” [Rom. 10:17]; all these speak firstly of *ministerium verbi* [the ministry of the Word], both in general and in particular. And in summary, since the common Gospel is God’s Word, which we are bound to believe by God’s mandate and command—where such faith is, there indeed must forgiveness and salvation be. Thus, the Gospel itself is a general absolution; for it is a promise that each and everyone must individually receive, by God’s mandate and command. Therefore we cannot forbid and condemn the general absolution as unchristian, as long as it serves this purpose: to remind the hearers that each individual must receive the Gospel as an absolution, and that it applies also to him—as indeed the form that you use is designed for such a reminder.

In opposition to this it has been said [by Osiander] that one cannot absolve a crowd in which there are many whom one should rather bind; one should also not absolve anyone who does not want it, etc. With regard to this, one must realize that preaching and jurisdiction¹³ are two different things.

¹³ Luther refers to the *potestas jurisdictionis*. Melancthon explains: “We like the old division of power into the “power of the order” [*potestas ordinis*] and the “power of jurisdiction” [*potestas jurisdictionis*]. Therefore, a bishop has the power of the order, namely, the ministry of Word and sacraments. He also has the power of jurisdiction, namely, the

Jurisdiction belongs to public sins; besides these there are many more private sins, which one can bind and punish in no other way than publicly, through the preaching office. Thus preaching binds all unbelievers and at the same time, by contrast, gives forgiveness to all believers, yes even to the one who has been bound through jurisdiction. If he through preaching comes again to obedience and faith, then it is forgiven him before God—although afterwards he should also be reconciled to the church, since he has also injured them. That the absolution under consideration is then *conditionalis* [conditional],¹⁴ is indeed the case, as always with public preaching. Indeed every absolution, both public and private, has the condition of faith. For apart from faith it does not loose [sin]—but that does not mean that it is a faulty key.¹⁵ For faith does not build upon our worthiness; it is just that one receives the absolution and says yes to it.

... And this is our opinion: since both sides agree on one thing, that private absolution is Christian and should be maintained, both parties are unanimously to admonish the people to this private absolution. And because Mr Osiander finds it burdensome to commend or to practise public absolution, he should not be compelled to do so, as long as for the sake of peace he does not attack the other party, who maintain public absolution; and conversely, he should also not be attacked by the other party. Both parties are to admonish the people to private absolution.¹⁶

Although the Wittenbergers' two responses were well-considered and evangelical, their practical effect was simply to restate the compromise of the original church order. Unfortunately, neither Osiander nor the city council was happy with it, and the controversy was bound to erupt again. When it did so in 1539, Melanchthon took on the role of mediator. Not wanting to take the public absolution away from the people, nor wishing to deny the valid points that Osiander had made, he proposed that an alternate wording of the public absolution might be the solution. Both he and Luther prepared one, and both were sent to Nürnberg in the hands of Veit Dietrich¹⁷ on 15 February 1540. Melanchthon's formula¹⁸ is verbose and rambling; it emphasizes the seriousness of the repentance and demands a renewal of life. Luther's attempt is briefer, and takes a new direction:¹⁹

authority to excommunicate those who are guilty of public offences or to absolve them if they are repentant and ask for absolution' (Ap 28:13).

¹⁴ Osiander's objection.

¹⁵ *Feilschlüssel; clavis errans*. Cf. WA 30.2:475; AE 40:337.

¹⁶ WA Br 6:527-30; my translation.

¹⁷ Veit Dietrich, a native of Nürnberg, studied theology in Wittenberg, served as Luther's private secretary, and then as a member of the Wittenberg philosophy faculty. In 1535 he was called to be a pastor in Nürnberg, where he remained until his death in 1549. Hence it was logical that he should serve as a go-between with Wittenberg.

¹⁸ CR 3:954-57.

¹⁹ *Leitourgia* 2:554.

Lieben freunde, weil wir alle sterblich, keine Stunde des Todes sicher sind, so demütigt euch vor Gott, bekennet in euren Herzen, daß wir alle arme Sünder seiner Gnaden und Vergebung alle Augenblick bedürfen. Und ob Gott heut oder morgen jemand unter euch von diesem Jammertal fordern würde, so spreche ich als ein Pfarrherr (Prediger) aus seinem Befehl alle, die itzt hie sind und Gottes Wort hören, und mit rechter Reue ihrer Sünd an unsern Herrn Jesum Christum glauben, los von allen Sünden im Namen des Vaters, Sohns und heiligen Geists, Amen. Gehet hin im Frieden, es sei leben oder sterben.

Dear friends, because we are all mortal, not being certain of the hour of [our] death, humble yourselves before God, [and] confess in your hearts that all we poor sinners have need of His grace and forgiveness at every moment. And in case God today or tomorrow should call any one of you from this vale of tears, I, as a pastor (preacher) by His mandate, pronounce all of you who are present and hear God's Word, and who with true repentance for your sin believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, free from all [your] sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace, whether to live or to die.

Luther stresses the necessity of forgiveness by pointing the sinner towards the possibility of sudden death. Only in this sense should it be understood as a substitute for private absolution. The stress, in Luther's characteristic manner, is on the absolution rather than the confession; it avoids an undue emphasis on the sinner's contrition or renewal of life.

Neither Melancthon's nor Luther's proposal was actually put into use in Nürnberg. Among their clergy, Osiander and Veit Dietrich stuck with the 1533 church order, which contained no public absolution. The other pastors continued to add Link's absolution formula by popular demand, especially after Veit Dietrich's death (1549) and when Osiander was away for lengthy periods during the Interims. In 1543 Veit Dietrich published a famous and popular agenda, in which he included no public absolution. All editions published after his death, however, included the Link formula, which thus continued in use every Sunday in Nürnberg for another 100 years.

It is interesting to note, however, that the general "indicative-operative" absolution was not introduced in Wittenberg or in subsequent Saxon agendas, despite its approval in principle by Luther and the other Saxon theologians and pastors. This invites a few final comments.

There are, on the one hand, weighty reasons why such a general absolution might be unwise from a pastoral perspective:

- The lazy old Adam in us may take the regular public act of confession and absolution as a substitute for private confession. This deprives the soul of this very personal act of pastoral care, and violates our church's confessional commitment to the retention of private absolution.

- The pastor may have genuine scruples of conscience, as did Osiander, that his public absolution may give unfounded comfort to unrepentant sinners in the congregation.
- A further danger arises in our age, when our churches are regularly visited by casual observers who may be unbaptized or even adherents of a false religion. It would be ungodly to confirm these impenitent souls in their dangerous condition.

On the other hand, Luther's weighty arguments bear repeating and expanding:

- The Gospel is such a rich treasure, that we should not be afraid to broadcast it in every possible form.
- In its essence, the general absolution is like a sermon that offers the Gospel of Christ to men of every stripe, to the greatest and least, without discrimination.
- Like the sermon, the absolution must be received in faith for it to be of benefit to the hearer. Likewise, it must be received by a repentant heart. The rites of our church do their utmost to ensure this happens by prefacing the absolution with an admonition to repentance, words of Scripture, and a hard-hitting general confession. The absolution is then offered with the condition, "Upon this your confession . . ."
- Finally, the pastor remains the man to whom Christ has committed the office of the keys. He must use his judgement in applying Law and Gospel to his congregation, which may lead him in a given situation to use or suspend the general absolution. Some pastors have found it wise to append words that explicitly exclude the impenitent from the absolution, a so-called "retention" formula—though I personally doubt that there is need for such added words of Law in light of the rite has already provided.

So there you have it. The liturgy arises from our confession and expresses it. It is a vehicle for pastoral care, in which Law and Gospel are properly divided and God's gifts are given out generously, sometimes even in reckless abandon. But if there were no need for human judgement, Christ would not have instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry for the careful and faithful giving out of these gifts. These data and thoughts have been offered in the hope of resourcing and encouraging such pastoral care.

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SERMON:
A MARRIAGE TOAST (JER. 31:31-34)*

Kurt Lantz

Dear guests of the bridegroom, assembled to celebrate the blessed union: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome to the Reception

The ceremony is complete and you honoured guests have been invited to share in the joy of this occasion. As we anticipate the great feast we are about to receive, please allow me to say a few words to mark this most memorable day.

It was a beautiful ceremony and there is no doubt, for we have all witnessed, that the bride and the bridegroom have been joined together before God. Nothing was omitted. The rite was full of wonderful imagery, heartfelt words, gracious promises, and the authoritative voice of God sealing the union. And “what God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

At this time I think it is appropriate for us to remember the long road that brought the bride and bridegroom to this time and place where they now enjoy the blessings of the indissoluble union into which they have now come.

Although love was there from the beginning, it has been a hard journey filled with worry, tears and heartache. It was not all joy. It was not all roses and white gowns. But it was a journey of love between these two that has resulted in the grand celebration we are privileged to participate in this day.

Not Like the Old Covenant

We would not only be kidding ourselves but also proclaiming outright deceitful lies if we were to pretend that the history of this relationship consisted of nothing but faithful adoration of each one for the other. Honestly, that is far from the truth. For faithfulness was not present in both parties in the beginning. One party was unfaithful. Infidelity threatened to tear these two apart for ever. It is not a fairy tale story but one full of the hard truth and reality of mankind’s sin.

* Preached on the 5th Sunday in Lent (6 April 2003) at Grace Lutheran Church, Kincardine, Ontario, and again on 30 March 2006 for the monthly meeting of the Hanover circuit.

But at first there was a wonderful rescue. The bridegroom heroically delivered His bride from the most desperate of situations. She was in dire condition indeed. The lovely and joyously happy bride you see today was dejected and depressed, trapped in an abusive relationship, and had all but given up hope of the dream of living a blessed life, loved by One who would always look out for her, protect her, take care of her, and make her life worth living.

Then when the smouldering wick of hope had almost lost its glow, He came to fan alive the flames of faith. As a knight in shining armour He carried her away from her tormentors. He delivered her from oppression and abuse to show her true love and affection. Her sorrow was turned to joy, her weeping into dancing, and her despair into delight.

Yet it was hard for her to adjust to this new relationship, so different from anything she had experienced before. She was not used to having her every need provided. She did not know what love was. She did not know how to receive it or to give it. And so towards her rescuer she became demanding. She was not content with the things He provided for her. She complained about the way He showed His love for her.

And finally it happened. We would like to say it was unthinkable although I'm sure that we are all thinking it. Nevertheless it must be mentioned, not to slander the name of this pure bride before us, but to let you all know what a wondrous love there is between this couple now.

She was unfaithful to Him. Although He rescued her from the most deplorable conditions, provided for her every need, pledged Himself to her and her alone, she turned away from Him and gave herself to others. And not just one other, but many others. She gave them what should have been given to Him alone. Although He was faithful, she broke their first union. That is why we find ourselves here today celebrating another union between this bridegroom and His beloved bride.

Signed on the Heart

Many people will say that these things should not be retold, especially at the wedding reception. I have to disagree. I think these things are most important for us all to know. It is essential that you understand that this union did not start off with a perfect love. It is necessary for us all to remember that unfaithfulness can be forgiven, that a broken union can be resealed, that a scorned husband can still pledge His love to the bride who has forsaken Him and win again for Himself the love she had given to others.

For that is how this seemingly irreconcilable couple has come to be the picture of wedded love and bliss for us today. He waited patiently for the right time. He allowed her once again to fall into despair. This time it was

not despair from others abusing her, but despair from her knowledge that she had abused herself. She came to realize that her sin had spotted and stained her, that she had lost her purity, that she had turned away from the one true love that ever there was.

When the hour had come He lifted Himself up before her in order to draw her to Himself. Once again He demonstrated His love for her in incomparable terms. He again heroically rescued her from her despair. This time He did not deliver her from an outside oppression, but from the enemy within her. He took away her shame and disgrace. He cleansed her of every impurity. He adorned her for Himself, having taken away every spot and stain of her adulterous sin.

Now she knows what love is, how to receive it and how to give it. For she has not only seen with her eyes the great deliverance He has provided; now she feels it in her heart. For He has touched her that deeply with this new act of love. He has reached to her very soul with His new pledge. No longer will she need to be taught what love is. Now she knows, for now she truly knows Him.

Did you pay attention to the words of the song she composed for this celebration?

My song is love unknown, My Saviour's love to me,
 Love to the loveless shown That they might lovingly be.
 Oh, who am I That for my sake
 My Lord should take Frail flesh and die? (*LW* 91)

So it is that today we gather to celebrate a union without end. Here is the bride perfectly loved by her bridegroom. He has forgiven her every act of unfaithfulness and that has made her faithful. She fittingly stands before us robed in pure white to reflect that her every spot and stain has been taken away in the love of her husband. She knows His great love and she will flee from every form of evil and cling to His loving embrace for evermore.

So I ask all of you present (angels, archangels, all the company of heaven), and especially you most beloved bride, to laud and magnify the most glorious name of the bridegroom, who has established a new covenant with His bride, sealed it with His blood and the cross, and bidden us here to celebrate the eternal union of Christ and His Church.

O bride, let us in a few moments raise a cup and drink in remembrance of the great love of the bridegroom for us, as we even now receive His inestimable grace and forgiveness and anxiously await the consummation of this new covenant.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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SERMON:
“GOD CALLS US INTO BATTLE”
(PSALM 27:1-3)*

John R. Wilch

David and Goliath:¹ What a favourite story for children’s Bibles and Sunday School, how the little boy defeated the giant warrior! However, David was not a skinny little 12-year-old as he is usually portrayed. After all, David described how he, while shepherding his father’s sheep, subdued first a bear and then a lion bare-handed (I Sam. 17:34-36). To help David battle Goliath, Saul offered him his armour and sword (v. 38). Now, when Saul became king of Israel, he was head-and-shoulders taller than everyone else (10:23). This does not mean that David must have been exceptionally tall. But it does mean that, although still a youth, he must have been full-grown with well-developed strength. David refused Saul’s armour not because he was too small or it was too heavy, but only because he was not accustomed to it (17:39). And not long after the Goliath incident, David was entrusted to lead one of the battalions in Israel’s army; and he became famous for winning his battles (18:5-7). And then, Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage (18:27).

This David, when seeing the challenge of the pagan Goliath, was called by God to take up that challenge. He was not experienced in wielding a sword, so he took the weapon he had often practised with while looking after the sheep—his slingshot (17:40). But David had first prepared himself with the spiritual weapon God had given him: unswerving trust that God would enable him to defeat this proud enemy of God’s chosen people (17:37). Then, he boldly engaged himself in battle as a good work in God’s Name.

Later on, David continued to trust in the LORD’S help, first, in fighting as a captain in Israel’s army. Then, when Saul turned against him and he was persecuted and pursued as a fugitive, he took his refuge spiritually in the LORD and physically wherever the LORD directed him. This was likely the period when he wrote many of the psalms we still love to read and sing today, such as our psalm of this week, Psalm 27 (vv. 1-9), in which David describes being pursued by his adversaries (vv. 2-3, 11-12).

* Preached in morning chapel at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, on Friday, 23 September 2005.

¹ In the chapel services in the week of Pentecost XVIII, I Samuel 17 was read.

Then, as king of Israel, David defended his people from enemies who attacked from all sides—and successfully. For, “the LORD is my light and salvation—whom should I fear?” (Ps. 27:1a). The second half of this verse may be rendered: “The LORD is my life’s defence—who can terrify me?”

In all his battles, David trusted explicitly and fully in the LORD, for he was convinced that, when confronted by the enemies of God’s people, “the battle is the LORD’S” (I Sam. 17:47). It is God who gave him the courage, wisdom, strength, and means, and who also weakened the enemy with foreboding and fear. Whether as shepherd, captain, or king, David knew that he was called by God—not to sit idly on his hands while God’s enemies attacked and terrorized his sheep or his people. He knew that God had equipped him to act, to perform good works for the sake of those who were entrusted to him.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is no different with **us**. We, too, are prepared by God to take up the challenge of those who today oppose God and attack His people. As David appeared insignificant compared to Goliath, who was 9 feet tall and whose armour weighed 200 pounds, so may we look like 90-pound weaklings confronted by our mighty spiritual enemies (see Eph. 6:12). For we are prone to sin, offending God, rebelling against His Word, and denying our Lord and Saviour. Nevertheless, God has called us to faith in Jesus Christ. He saved us from our rebellion through repentance and forgiveness—purely by His love and grace in Christ (Eph. 2:4-5, 8).² With this marvellous free gift, we in turn firmly trust in Him alone with full confidence, as David did.

Besides our free gift of forgiveness and salvation, God has honoured us beyond all worldly expectations. In Ephesians 2 (vv. 5-6), the Apostle Paul describes how God raises us up from being bound to this world of sin and disaster to ascend with our Lord Jesus Christ into His heavenly Kingdom that does not belong to this world and yet exists among and in us!³ As we are united with our risen and ascended Lord in Holy Communion, and as we were buried and raised up with Christ in Holy Baptism, and as we renew our Baptism daily through contrition and repentance and through striving with our Lord’s help to fulfil his will in our works of love, so we experience His strengthening and reassuring and fulfilling Presence. Here on this earth we are **already** experiencing life as if in Heaven!

Thus, we need not seek out counsellors or drugs against depression or pangs of guilt or unworthiness or failure. For God has already resurrected us, caused us to ascend up to the highest levels of acceptance as His own

² Ephesians 2:4-10 was a Scripture reading in the chapel service on 23 Sept. 2005.

³ See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 419.

children, as heirs of His eternal Kingdom, as sharers in the spoils of His ultimate Victory (Is. 53:12), as fellow rulers over the world!⁴ We are **already** honoured, esteemed, rewarded, and fulfilled! We lack nothing at all!

All this is ours not by any goodness in us, nor by any accomplishments. We do not deserve it, nor can we earn it by any amount of biblical or theological study or teaching, nor of pastoral service—40 years in the ministry or in faithful congregational or seminary service are no help at all, because we **already** have it all! It is ours by God's free grace in Christ!

God had given David forgiveness and confident faith, and He saved him from wild animals that attacked his sheep. Then God called him to much greater challenges: first, to take on Goliath, then to battle enemy armies and to establish securely the Kingdom of Israel. David could not sit on the sidelines wasting his talents in sports, body-building, videos, or the internet, idly watching while God's people were being harassed and persecuted by one enemy after another. Having been assured of everlasting salvation (see e.g. Ps. 27:13), David was called into action to perform good deeds in God's Name.

When I was a boy in my home congregation, we Sunday School children, after the devotional opening, all went to our classes singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Was that awful to have children imagine they were soldiers marching off to war? Well, dear sisters and brothers in Christ: This is precisely what Jesus is calling us to do: "Onward, Christian soldiers!"

We have dealt with what God has saved us **from**, and with the spiritual gain that He has saved us **to**. But there is another important facet of what God has saved us **for**: Although we are not saved because of any works we do, God definitely calls us to a lifestyle of doing good works (Eph. 2:10). We all know many kinds of good works that could be mentioned, that pertain to the seminary or the ministry, or to performing one's occupation well, or helping the disadvantaged, or being good parents for our children.

But I Samuel 17 and Psalm 27 point to one special kind of good works that we usually overlook: engaging in battle! Too often, we conceive of the pastoral ministry as essentially nothing more than preaching and teaching God's Word and administering the sacraments, in other words, going through the motions of "maintenance ministry", keeping the congregation going. Well, my friends, that is truly essential, but it's only the first step. For we today are being severely challenged by God's enemies. Our society is slipping more and more down the slippery slope of godlessness, immorality, and decadence. Popular music and films are decadent without any redeeming or uplifting value, deadening our spirituality into meaninglessness. We in the

⁴ See Is. 54:3; Dan. 7:18, 27; Matt. 5:5; Rom. 5:17; I Cor. 6:2; II Tim. 2:12; cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 20:4.

church have winked at easy marriage, easy divorce, easy extra-marital sex, easy contraception, and easy abortion, so that it is no wonder that we are now challenged by homosexuality, lesbianism, and same-sex marriage.

New Orleans became famous for its anything-goes Mardi Gras, so that its year-round party atmosphere attracted many conventions. One of the largest of these was that of homosexuals, unashamedly called “Southern Decadence”. Hurricane Katrina struck the “Big Easy” (on 29 Aug. 2005) just a few days before the next scheduled gay blow-out. Perhaps this was a form of divine judgement upon a city that welcomed the worst forms of idolatry and immorality.

Do we have the courage to answer God’s call to take up arms, to take up the banner of the Cross of Christ and to denounce our society’s sinfulness? Not only is our society becoming decadent—the church is also endangered! Besides our embattled positions here at home, the Church throughout the world is being attacked on many fronts by hostile governments and religions: Hindus are repeatedly persecuting Christians in India and Nepal; Buddhists are doing this in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam—and Muslims likewise in Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Sudan, and many other Islamic countries. Indeed, Islam is today the Church’s greatest and most dangerous enemy in the world.

Yet, we need not fear! As David was confident in the face of God’s enemies, so are we! We share his declaration: “The LORD is my light and salvation—whom should I fear?” (Ps. 27:1). God calls us much beyond maintenance ministry. He calls us to arms to fight the enemies who are destroying the morality of our society and our church! He calls us to enlist in His war against His enemies who are persecuting the Christian Church!

Let us then learn about the suffering of persecuted Christians; let us pray for them; let us write comforting letters to them. Let us arm each other against the false teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, and Islam—false religions that promise peace which they cannot fulfil. For they know nothing of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ. They have no assurance of forgiveness and true salvation, or resurrection and ascension to God’s Kingdom. Thus, they have no real peace and joy, no real honour and fulfilment. Let us never lose the most valuable treasures that we have!

Let us proclaim these treasures loud and clear to all people with confidence in the sure Victory we already have in Christ! Let us take up the weapons God has provided us with—His Word, faith, and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:14-17)! Let us take on our enemies of immorality and idolatry! David declared to Goliath: “The battle is the LORD’S—He shall give you into our hands!” (I Sam. 17:47). And he professed in Psalm 27 (v. 1b): “The LORD is my life’s defence—who can terrify me?” Amen.

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