

LUTHERAN FORUM



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STILL LIFE WITH BAPTISM

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

*In commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary
of the beginning of the Reformation
and in gratitude to God for Martin Luther,
Confessor of the Christian faith*

1976

“My faith does not make baptism; rather, it receives baptism.”

I don’t remember the event I am about to report. I was only thirty-seven days old at the time.

St. Lucas Evangelical Lutheran Church, its name an Americanization of the Slovak *Svätý Lukáš* (Saint Luke), had blue windows. No stained-glass images of the good shepherd or Moses with his curly snake, just drifting shades of blue. They cast a cooling tint over the sanctuary and somehow made the roof of interlocking wooden beams mounted atop plain brick walls look even higher. The baptismal font was straight out of a catalog, an undistinguished oak affair ringed round with vaguely Celtic carvings and a gold-plated lid shaped like a chess pawn.

It was a Sunday because private family baptisms were already on the way out. But by the constituency of the congregation you might have taken it for a family baptism anyway. Baptism was a big enough deal to draw the New Jersey and Michigan branches of the family all the way to St. Louis, all by car, hence the choice of the long Fourth of July weekend for the event—definitely not any especial patriotism to mark my rebirth in Christ on the exact same day that America was celebrating its two hundredth birthday. Everyone was there: both sets of grandparents, all five of my uncles (as of yet no aunts), distant cousins, family friends, and all the parishioners gladly claiming kinship with fellow Slovaks. Jaroslav Vajda preached.

My grandfather Hinlicky, a long-time pastor of Slovak-

American congregations on the east coast, baptized me. I was his first grandchild and born the day after his birthday. Years later on his deathbed he would bless me to take up the mantle of Christian ministry, to the surprise of us both. But the greater blessing was the baptism. “Sarah Ellen,” he said, scooping the water out of the shallow bowl set in the font, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” And the congregation said: “Amen.”

Then my young mother had the dubious honor of being the very last woman to undergo the churching of women rite at my grandfather’s hands. “I don’t think I’m going to do this anymore,” he said afterward. Maybe it was the look on her face.

When it was all over, I am told, there was an epic party. Because—

“It is of the greatest importance that we regard baptism as excellent, glorious, and exalted.”

1984

“The power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism is that it saves. To be saved, as everyone well knows, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, to enter into Christ’s kingdom, and to live with him forever.”

St. Peter’s had brokered a deal with Citibank. The bank could build its fifty-nine-story Citicorp Center in midtown Manhattan over the site of the old Lutheran church, on the condition that it built the congregation a new church in the same spot, sealed off from the tower of Babel and its mammon ways. The resulting skyscraper had its supporting columns at the sides instead of the corners to accommodate the new church—a design so structurally unsound that the year after its construction it was secretly rewelded at

night over the course of three months. The general public didn't find out the danger it could have posed till nearly twenty years later.

The new church, however, was a rare case of beauty and elegance in a modern key. The ceiling soared, the vast white walls recalled the vault of heaven, right-angled blond wood pews on three sides and tangram organ pipes bespoke a conviction that the Holy Spirit would abundantly fill in the remaining space. Of greatest fascination to me was the baptismal font: a deep square stone pool, gently simmering and rippling across the surface. I'd seen grown men and women slide under the water at the Easter Vigil. I was excited to see my baby brother, not even a month old, undergo the same treatment.

It was the eighth of January, cold and slushy outside, the baptismal water barely warm within. Not quite the full complement of uncles was in attendance this time, nor the Slovak front, though one of Will's godparents counted among the tribe. John Damm, already an old pro at immersing babies, took my tiny brother and plunged him in three times, once for each Person of the holy Trinity. And each time he came forth Will bellowed with the full force of his infant lungs in rage and protest.

When it was all over, Damm quipped, "We sure drowned the old Adam out of that one!"

From that day on I've been convinced that Will's was the only fitting response to everything that baptism is: seizure from the clutches of death and the devil; drowning of the sinful self; being crucified with Christ; getting thrust into a new life without preparation or choice; enduring the radiance of God's mercy while still saddled with reluctantly converted flesh.

"These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, point to the power and effect of baptism, which is nothing else than the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new creature, both of which must continue in us our whole life long."



1994

"Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after."

My year in Slovakia was drawing to a close. My family life as I had always known it was drawing to a close. I'd finished high school a year early to spend what would have been my senior year with my parents and brother on their adventure of moving to Slovakia, but in less than two months I'd be repatriating, and less than two months after that starting college. On an evening late in May we went to dinner to celebrate my eighteenth birthday: adulthood, or so government and culture told me. I did not want to leave, I had never approved of growing up, and I was unprepared for the next frontier.

Except that I was, whether I liked it or not, just as I got baptized whether I liked it or not. My parents gave me an assortment of presents, but the one that meant most and stuck with

me ever after was a scroll of printer paper, rolled up and tied with a ribbon, presented to me ceremonially. It was headed: "Submitted for APPROVAL TO THE COMMITTEE TO ENSURE A FAITHFUL, HONORABLE, AND INTERESTING LIFE FOR SARAH ELLEN HINLICKY." A number of "WHEREBY" clauses ensued, detailing the history of my life thus

God Himself stakes His honor on baptism.

far, which then gave way to a "THEREFORE": "THEREFORE, WE, having unexpectedly but gladly become parents of this young person eighteen years ago, do BESTOW and BEQUEATH EVERYTHING upon her which she will need in order to successfully conduct the balance of her years upon this Earth."

My goodly heritage followed. And first on the list:



The lifelong promise given to her in her BAPTISM on July 4, 1976. In the words of Martin Luther: *To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort: "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."*

2006

"Baptism is a very different thing from all other water, not by virtue of the natural substance but because here something nobler is added, for God himself stakes his honor, his power, and his might on it. Therefore it is not simply a natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water—praise it in any other terms you can—all by virtue of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word that no one can sufficiently extol, for it contains and conveys all that is God's."

The question was whether Andrew and I could have our son baptized in the river that ran behind one of the churches in my parents' two-point parish. My dad wasn't sure. "Pentecostals go down there all the time for baptisms," he told me, "but I'm not sure if a Lutheran's ever been baptized there before. Let's see how the congregation reacts first."

As it turned out, the local Lutherans—known in the rural corners of southwestern Virginia as "country Catholics"—were delighted at the prospect of not only a Lutheran but a baby getting saved in the New River. Each of the congregations threw us a baby shower (due as much to non-acceptance of their undesired yoking as to exuberance on our behalf), and when the day arrived they spontaneously organized lawn mowing to clear the path from church to river and van service for old folks who couldn't walk that far.

Everything but the final critical words took place in the sanctuary of the modest nineteenth-century brick walls and red doors and red carpet that made up the church: godparental vows (offered by my brother Will and, on Andrew's side, by our sister-in-law Katie), flood prayer, renunciation of the devil, and creed. Then the whole assembly decamped from the building and traversed the hundred or so yards to the riverbank. Most everyone stayed up top. My dad, officiating, and Andrew and I picked our way down the stony path to the water, tucked up our respective alb or trousers or dress, and waded in, with a characteristically relaxed and happy Ezekiel Zelaya in our arms.

It makes no never mind what kind

of water you do the business in. But something about relinquishing your child over flowing waters, waters headed downstream as fast as gravity will allow, waters that will drown as easily as they will irrigate, eliminates all sanitary and sanitizing notions of "bath" and "washing" from the mind and focuses maternal anxiety squarely on "we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death" (Romans 6:4).

Not that my dad could quite bring himself to put his first and only grandson all the way under; he lacked John Damm's long experience. Still, the boy went into the water, wet and cold and shocking to his eight-month-old flesh. He gasped and clenched up at each of his three semi-immersions. "—in the name of the Father," *gasp-clench*, "and of the Son," *gasp-clench*, "and of the Holy Spirit," *gasp-clench*. But no screaming this time. Some deaths go gently.

In this way, thirty years after I got baptized by my grandfather Hinlicky, whose birthday was the day before mine, my son got baptized by *his* grandfather Hinlicky, whose birthday was the day before his. We took it as a providential pattern to confirm the divinely arranged place of our adopted son in his new family.

Zeke's baptism came right in time. I needed him baptized, because I was floundering in the worst faith crisis of my life. I can't now reconstruct why, or what it was about, even; I remember only the long affliction and demoralizing fear that none of this was true. It didn't do me any good anymore to

*My small baptized
son's witness
restored me to
my own baptism.*

declare, "But I am baptized!" Because what if baptism was—nothing?

During this time Zeke was starting to talk. The first thing he learned to recognize and love was frogs. "Froggy!"

he'd shout. The second was Jesus. He could pick Jesus out anywhere, no matter how varied the artwork. A wooden sculpture of Jesus' face crowned with thorns—a stern Byzantine icon—a Reformation-era altarpiece—a sentimental painting—a children's Bible: he always knew it was Jesus, and he would always point, like a little John the Baptist, crying out, "Jeezy! Jeezy!" And he was always so *happy* to see "Jeezy."

In time, as mysteriously as the unbelief came over me it departed again, unable to resist Zeke's joyful infant faith. That's what healed me. Not books or thoughts or church services or my own flattened prayers. My small baptized son's witness restored me to my own baptism.

"Therefore baptism remains forever. Even though someone falls from it and sins, we always have access to it so that we may again subdue the old creature."

2017

"To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act."

By the time the long-anticipated anniversary year of the Reformation rolled around, I had been ordained more than a decade but had not yet baptized one single soul into the body of Christ.

I took comfort in St. Paul's remark, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17), as if there were nothing self-evident about conjoining the two activities, Augsburg Confession notwithstanding. At least so I told myself whenever I felt I was living in an unconsummated ordination.

Circumstances had everything to do with it. My one spell of parish ministry lasted less than two years, the youngest members were forty years older than me, and neither babies nor converts were to be found in our midst. I spent the next eight years in a call to a research position in ecumenical theology: also not known for large



populations of babies and converts. Opportunities arose to preach, and more rarely still to preside at the Supper, both of which I seized, but nary a baptism. Christ did not send me to baptize but to ponder Christian disunity, which Paul could just as easily have written to his fissiparous congregation at Corinth.

Natalie, a pastor herself, knew of my plight, and long before she had the child, much less the husband, by which to validate her promise, she announced that I would be the one to baptize her firstborn into the kingdom of God. I was moved by the act of friendship but didn't give it much more thought. Providence evidently took the vow more seriously. The husband arrived in due course (informed on an early date of the baptismal stipulation, before the marriage discussion was even on the table; he took it well), and then the baby. And then the abundance of the Holy Spirit: Natalie asked me to be godmother as well as baptizer, and to baptize her nephew as well as her daughter. "Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion" (Isaiah 61:7).

This time it was at the magnificent First Lutheran in Pittsburgh, the only

Art Nouveau Lutheran church I've even seen. On the back wall gleams a Tiffany-glass Good Shepherd, and at the front is an elaborate mosaic of the Virgin and Child, whose pearly sheen matches the white marble altar below. And also matches, somewhat less fortuitously, the baptismal font: a life-size kneeling angel with drooping wings and a giant scallop shell balanced between white marble hands—theologically ambiguous at best.

The baptism took place on Epiphany, which fell on the eighth of January, the anniversary of my brother's baptism. In the course of the service I did three things I had never done

*I felt I was living in
an unconsummated
ordination.*

before: I wore a cope; I genuflected; and I baptized. One of the congregational pastors led me and the other godparents through our vows. Then I switched sides and finally, finally, celebrated the other sacrament.

Thomas first: he was a toddler already, delighted at the proceedings,

splashing his hands in the angel's shell as I swept the water over his head and placed the name of the triune God on him. Then Maryam, my long-awaited goddaughter, who obliged her theologian godmother by screaming out all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises as I laid the true and everlasting promises of God upon her.

I have spent a lot of years by now struggling with the Christian faith, with the disappointments of the church, with bad theology and con-

gregational sickness and division and disunity. At times I have wondered why I stick with it, why the Almighty sees fit to entrust His ministry of reconciliation to such egregiously unrecornciled ambassadors, myself included. But when I baptized—when God baptized through my hands and voice—it was such pure, abject, radiant joy that I knew I was all in, forever and ever, thanks be to God, alleluia and amen.

“Baptism is far more glorious that anything else God has commanded and ordained;

in short, it is so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it.”

LF

Quotations in italics are taken from Martin Luther's Large Catechism in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), except for the final quotation in the section “1994,” which comes from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959).

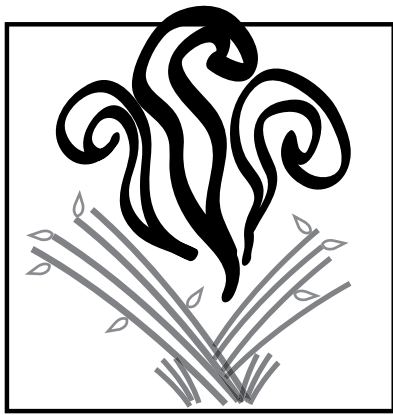
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THE TRINITY IN EZEKIEL

Robert W. Jenson

Since as a systematic theologian I have written much about the Trinity, and as a very late-blooming biblical scholar I have published a commentary on Ezekiel, it was probably inevitable that I would be asked to connect the two. And if the commentary is, as advertised by Brazos Press, a “theological” commentary, and my theology is, as claimed by me, biblical, this should be possible.

As it happens, finding the Trinity in Ezekiel is easy; no figurative or other special reading is required, appropriate as such exegesis may be in other contexts or with other Old Testament books. All that is required is willingness to recognize trinitarian accounts and rhetoric when they are on the page before us—a willingness, to be sure, still not common in the guild of designated biblical scholars. Indeed, the more interesting question is not “Where can we find the Trinity in Ezekiel?” but rather “What can Ezekiel teach us about the Trinity?”

I

The Trinity is plainly delineated in the book’s first verses that introduce the prophet and his call.¹ Ezekiel first introduces himself: “As I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. And the hand of the Lord was on me there.”² Then an editor introduces him again³: “The Word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel... in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar.” Here are two different modes of revelation, vision and word, with their respective agents, the Hand of the Lord and the Word of the Lord. Here also is the One “of” Whom both the Word and the Hand are revelations/revealers. And—a decisive point—the editor who interpolated the one introduction, with its description of verbal revelation to the prophet, did not erase the other.⁴ In the canonical text, revelation by advent of the Word and revelation by impact of the Hand *together* make the structure of the Lord’s revelation through Ezekiel.

Throughout Ezekiel’s book, “The Word of the Lord came to me” is the regular introduction to his reception of a verbal prophecy, most of which begin, “Thus says the Lord...”⁵ The arriving Word is not the particular prophecy being enabled; rather the Word that brings Ezekiel a

series of different messages is always the same being—a phenomenon that appears also with other prophets.⁶ Perhaps we may say that this Word is a singular and active Message who enables and authorizes particular messages. Is then the Word the Lord’s speech or is the Word the Lord speaking? In Ezekiel’s use of the phrase, it would seem we must think of both at once. And so we encounter the very Word Who appears in John’s prologue and in developed trinitarian theology.

“The hand of the Lord” is a frequent Old Testament expression for the Lord’s impetus in His people’s history. In Ezekiel, “The hand of the Lord was... upon me” is his invariable description of the onset of prophetic vision, which is thus felt as a forceful act of the Lord, as a sort of liberating blow. We are therefore not surprised to discover that when Ezekiel is in a vision, he is under the control of “the Spirit,” the wind, *ruach*, of God Who through much of the Old Testament account blows Israel’s history forward. At least in Ezekiel, “the Hand of the Lord” and “the Spirit” have finally the same referent.

The joint work of the Word and the Hand/Spirit in Ezekiel’s prophesying is the revelation of the Lord from Whom they come. Within that work they have each their own part: one is and enables word and the other is and enables vision, nor do they ever exchange roles. We should attend to this, for Western theology has been vitiated by a persistent error. It is a necessary and ecumenically accepted doctrine that “the externally directed works of the Trinity are indivisible.”⁷ But in the West this has often been taken⁸ to mean that the three triune persons all do or can do the same thing⁹: that, for central example, any of the three could have become incarnate. Or—for truly bizarre sticking to a bad rule—that in principle the voice at Jesus’ baptism could be the Spirit and the dove a symbol of the Father. It is at least arguable that the dysfunction of trinitarian understanding in much Western churchly life¹⁰ is partly the result of this blunder. Ezekiel knows no such abstractions and we should learn from him: the works of the Word and of the Hand/Spirit are indivisible in that precisely by their *difference* they make one *joint* work of revelation. In the language—but too often not in the assertion—of developed doctrine, the “missions” may for some purposes be distin-

guished from the “processions,” but are not other than them.

II

Ezekiel’s call to prophecy occurs as and in a vision (1:4–3:15), in accord with his self-introduction. By the Babylonian river Chebar, he sees the tremendous arrival—but on wheels!—of God’s heavenly throne,¹¹ whose earthly double was the cherubim-throne in the Temple. The throne bears the “glory of the Lord,” which resolves into an “appearance” that is “the figure of a man” (1:26, my translation). Three trinitarian matters present themselves.

The first. The “glory of the Lord” in Ezekiel has the same structure we just noted with the Word of the Lord—and can find elsewhere in the Old Testament with “the angel of the Lord”¹² and “the Name of the Lord.” This mysterious and tremendous¹³ Shining Forth of the Lord is *related to* the Lord by that “of”—rabbinic speculation even posits conversation between them. Yet the Glory is simultaneously the *same* as the Lord, so that when Ezekiel sees the Glory’s departure from the desecrated Temple and the Glory’s return to the eschatological Temple, what he sees is the Lord’s own departure and return (10:18–19, 11:22–23, 43:1–9). The creed of Nicea formulated this relation by saying that the “Son of God” is nevertheless *homousion to patri*. It is this unique relation that is the reality of the second person of Trinity, rather than some *logos asarkos*¹⁴ or “Christ-principle” or other metaphysical or metaphorical construct.

The second. The Glory on the throne looks like a man. This can be taken as a piece of anthropomorphism, in which case we have the task of explaining this “appearance” away, or at least of demythologizing it. But there is another reading, which requires no such expedients: fathers of the church supposed that the Glory appearing to Ezekiel looked like a man because He is one.¹⁵ For they

knew of an actual identifiable man, with His personal story and personal name, Who shines like the figure on the throne¹⁶: Jesus on the mountain of Transfiguration. Who could the man on the throne be but He?

It is usually supposed that the triune second person is incarnate only after Mary becomes pregnant, and in some pickwickian sense this must be true. But what if the man on Tabor is already on the cherubim-throne? We would have to rethink our notions of time. And indeed, can we really plot the life of God on any linear scheme, so that the man on the throne cannot yet be the man on the mountain? What in the life of God with us can be the meaning of that “after” or that “already” or that “cannot yet”? Not that there is none, but what is it? Some more recondite bits of the doctrine of the Trinity are an effort to think that through.

The third. Let us suppose those fathers had it right. What then does the Spirit show Ezekiel when He has him in His grip? Ezekiel sees no abstracted or unidentified figure; he sees Jesus as the risen Christ. In the New Testament, the work of the Spirit is materially defined: “He will take *what is mine* and declare it to you” (John 16:14). The Spirit is not the free-floating innovator of much current Protestant—and indeed “progressive” Catholic—rhetoric. Just as in this key scene in Ezekiel, the Spirit shows to His prophets Jesus as the Christ, and those who, allegedly led by the Spirit, see something else are false prophets. The Spirit indeed does new things, but the fact that something is new does not prove it is done by the Spirit; there are plenty of other spirits around.

III

The Word of the Lord and the Hand/Spirit of the Lord, named at the beginning of Ezekiel’s book, are then through the whole book the carriers of the revelatory action. And there is no confusion of their roles; they are not interchangeable aspects of

Ezekiel’s prophesying.

There is, however, what classical trinitarian teaching calls “perichoresis,” mutual interplay. In Ezekiel this for the most part consists in the alternation and mutual reinforcement of word and vision within the dramatic sweep of the book. For Ezekiel’s book does have an overall dramatic structure, which has been noticed since its earliest exegetes. There is a first large group of chapters proclaiming and envisioning judgment on Israel for its faithlessness (1:4–24:27), then a transitional group shifting blame and punishment to the nations who were the agents of judgment (25–32), and finally the great oracles and visions of restoration and eschatological perfection (33–48). These units match the history through which Ezekiel lived as a prophet: prophesy during the years of exile, to a rebellious people; prophesy against the enemies of a more than sufficiently punished people; and prophesy of a both penultimate and eschatological return to Zion.

Occasionally, however, the perichoresis of Word and Hand/Spirit is tighter and more suggestive of an interplay in the triune life itself. Sometimes messenger-words beginning with “Thus says the Lord...” are commissioned *within* a vision ruled by the Spirit; then no report of the Word’s coming is needed. Thus within the call vision, the man on the throne speaks to Ezekiel to commission him: “Son of a man, I am sending you to the people of Israel... and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God...’” (2:3–4). Or in the vision of an eschatological Temple (40–47), after the Glory has entered it, He speaks directly to the prophet to give the laws of its service.

IV

Perhaps, however, the deepest level of Ezekiel’s trinitarianism is not found in such specific features of the revelatory action. As I have increasingly emphasized in more recent writing, the soteriological heart of trinitarian doctrine is sheer insistence that God has history

with Himself and not just with us, and that in that history He is not other than in His history with us. As Scripture in fact narrates God's history with us, it displays three divine *dramatis personae*, Whom the revealed name calls Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, says the doctrine, *is* these three; they are *personae* of the life that is God. Moreover, the history of which Father, Son, and Spirit are the *dramatis personae* has a plot. The doctrine drastically summarizes this plot by the so-called trinitarian "processions"—the Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten by the Father, the Father breathes the Spirit on the Son¹⁷—and says that these relations constitute God's own life. I could go on with further features of the doctrine, but these are perhaps enough to set up the following point.

The most important way in which Ezekiel's prophesying demands such doctrine of God is its relentless refusal to separate God's sovereign life from His involvement in features and events of the history He ordains. In Ezekiel, God ruling history is not other than God involved within history. The following sampler is arrayed more or less at random. The sovereign gratuitous events of revelation are carefully dated according to a succession of this age's rulers. The heavenly winged throne of the opening vision has wheels and trundles along on the same earth on which Ezekiel's feet are planted—to the offense of some modern commentators, who assign this provision of earthly transport to interpolators not up to sublimities. The vision of the eschatological Temple, even as it transcends what could possibly be built on any site in this age, harps on material embodiment, insisting on providing detailed measurements in standard units, of a plan that follows the layout of ancient temples generally and provides for animal sacrifice. The Lord's ordaining of Israel's punishments and blessings is not done at a distance; if Israel is to be maintained within actual history there will be wars, and the Lord takes sides and personally wields

the sword—whether for or against Israel, or in one case both at once. The eschatological Promised Land is laid out by sheer theology rather than by any conceivable earthly topography yet is nevertheless imposed on the familiar space between the Mediterranean and the Jordan with its seas. Sometimes the Lord's appearance as a *persona* within the history He ordains even determines the literary form: the Lord both tells Ezekiel the great allegory of Jerusalem as a foundling and faithless bride (ch. 16) and appears as one of the figures in the allegory. I could go on—and reproduce much of my commentary.

The Lord's personal commitment to His history with His people, and His compromising involvement in it, have a disconcerting consequence for our understanding of God's triunity, which may be Ezekiel's—and the Old Testament's—chief admonition in this context. When we Christians come to talk of God, we tend to forget that the present age of His creation is fallen, that it is conflicted and often violent, *and* that this cannot be irrelevant for our understanding of a Creator who rules by His Word with His creatures and by His historically active Hand upon them. Presumably this God could simply abandon the fallen creation—which is what any of us would have done—but if He does not, His speaking and acting within it will involve Him personally with it. Which, matters standing as they do, is to say that He will precisely as triune be involved in conflict and violence.

Therefore, if we hearken to Ezekiel, we will not construe the triune life as a serene flow of "unconditional love" or some other such abstraction. Jesus' cry of abandonment¹⁸ is an event between the Father and the Son; and it sums up the picture of the Lord's conflict within history drawn by Ezekiel. Do bitter love and liberation and even reconciliation occur in the triune life? If we take cues from Ezekiel, we will suppose that they do, however we may further conceptualize that. ✠

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Notes

1. The present text is obviously the result of editorial interpolation, which a due regard for canonicity will not think to be theologically disqualifying.

2. Verse 3c almost certainly belongs with v. 1; and its pronoun therefore should be "me" as in the Septuagint, not "him" as in the Masoretic text. We should not forget that the Septuagint translation was made centuries before the Masoretes stabilized the Hebrew text.

3. Perhaps in the course of editing a group of prophetic books for uniformity.

4. Observing this sort of editing is often important in reading the Old Testament.

5. In the jargon of form criticism, a "messenger-word."

6. Gerhard von Rad made this point clear, not only for Ezekiel but for all the prophets.

7. If, for example, the Father did the creating by Himself and the Son did the redeeming by Himself, that would make two gods.

8. By theologians, that is.

9. This is a consequence of the view that the three are not only *equal* in deity but *identical* in deity.

10. And if you don't think this is the case, pay attention to the liturgy and sermon next Trinity Sunday.

11. The old rabbis noted that this is the only direct vision of heaven in Israel's Scripture. It thus provided the occasion for *Merkabah* or "Chariot" mysticism, the attempt to ascend to God through this opening; mainline Judaism regarded this as dangerous.

12. Of the Old Testament revelations of the second triune identity, this is the most frequent and spectacular, occurring through the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomic history. See especially the *Akedah* at Genesis 22.

13. Otto got this right.

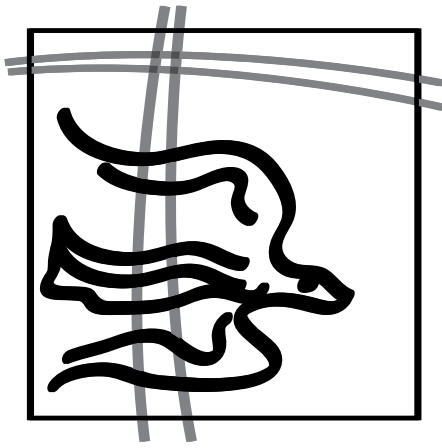
14. Whatever otherwise may be the need for this construction.

15. For Gregory the Great's amazing exegesis, see my commentary *ad loc.*

16. That Jesus' glory is the very glory of God is the Orthodox interpretation; Western theology has domesticated the vision by making Jesus' glory "created" glory. The East seems to me clearly in the right.

17. Some of us think this traditional list is incomplete, but this is probably not the place to go into that.

18. Moltmann's exploitation of the cry is too ideology-driven to be quite right. Nevertheless, it is closer to Scripture than the usual attempts to explain the cry away.



NEW TESTAMENT

THE LAMENT OF THE RESPONSIBLE CHILD

Elisabeth Ann Johnson

As a doctoral student in New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1995 to 2000, I had the privilege of working with Donald Juell as his student and teaching assistant. With his untimely death in 2003, the church lost a brilliant, passionate interpreter of Scripture—one who was never content with easy answers and would not allow his students to be either. He was particularly vigilant for the ways we try to protect ourselves from Scripture by glossing over or explaining away its troublesome elements. His reading of the “Parable of the Prodigal Son” is a classic example of this vigilance and of his ability to open up a text with a fresh and often unsettling interpretation.

What follows is my attempt to communicate the essence of Juell’s reading of Luke 15:11–32, based primarily on the “oral tradition” of his lectures on the Gospel of Luke.¹ His interpretation will inevitably be intertwined with my own musings. In so doing, I hope to convey a measure of what I and countless other students have learned from him about interpreting Scripture and how Scripture interprets us.

Any interpretation of a parable must consider its literary context. The parable commonly called “The Prodigal Son” (Luke 15:11–32) is the third in a series Jesus tells in response to the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes: “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (15:1–2).

For many who have grown up in the church, the mere mention of “Pharisees and scribes” conjures up our worst stereotypes of legalists concerned only with the minutiae of the law. Yet Luke understands the gravity of the Pharisees’ concerns. They regarded their God-given calling to live according to the Law of Moses with utter seriousness. They believed that the very survival of the Jewish faith depended on preserving their traditions and distinctive way of life in the midst of Roman occupation. They were reformers and pietists who sought to renew the faith by applying biblical laws concerning ritual purity to all Jews (not only priests)

and to every aspect of life (not only temple worship). To use a Lutheran phrase, one could say that the Pharisees believed in “the priesthood of all believers.” They took seriously God’s calling that they become “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” among the Gentiles (Exodus 19:6).

Throughout Luke’s Gospel, the consistent concern of the Pharisees and scribes² is Jesus’ seemingly cavalier attitude toward the law. They confront Jesus and his disciples particularly about laws regarding Sabbath observance and table fellowship (e.g., Luke 5:29–6:11), two sets of practices especially important to sustaining social and religious cohesion among the Jewish people. What disturbed the Pharisees about Jesus was that by sharing table fellowship with “tax collectors and sinners” who showed no regard for the law, he gave the impression that law observance did not matter. Since Jesus was gaining a following among the people, the Pharisees viewed his recklessness about the law as dangerous, a threat to religious and social order.

Jesus responds to the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes by telling three parables about God’s concern for the lost. The parables of the lost sheep and lost coin parallel one another closely. In both cases, the protagonist searches high and low for what is lost, and in both cases, the rejoicing over finding what was lost provides an image of the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (15:7, 10).

Then comes the “Parable of the Prodigal Son.” In calling the parable by its traditional title, we are predisposed to think that the younger son is the main character in the story. We also tend to assume that this is another story about the joy in heaven over a sinner who repents. The two preceding parables prepare us for this to be the point of the story, and certainly this has been the prevailing interpretation in the church. Yet nowhere in the story are we told that the prodigal repents of his reprehensible behavior. Indeed, it is significant that the closing refrain about joy in heaven over a sinner who repents is absent in this third parable.

Certainly the traditional interpretation focusing on the supposed repentance of the prodigal and the gracious welcome of the father has brought comfort to countless sinners. The problem, however, is that this interpretation

tends to ignore the final third of the parable (15:25–32), the part that deals with the elder son. If this part of the parable is addressed at all, the elder son is usually treated in a dismissive way as a legalistic Pharisee who cannot understand grace.

The fact that the parable is told in response to the grumbling of the Pharisees suggests that the elder son is central to the story and his concerns are to be taken seriously. When his objections are given due consideration, the story changes significantly. Viewing the story through the elder son's eyes, might we see, not a repentant son and forgiving father, but a manipulative son and enabling father?

The younger son approaches his father with a brazen request: "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me" (15:12). When the request is granted, we can imagine that this is not the first time the father has indulged his son in a manner most parents would find unwise. Perhaps the elder son has watched this kind of thing happening for years.

After taking off with his share of the inheritance and promptly squandering it in "dissolute living," the younger son ends up in such a desperate state that he is forced to take a job feeding pigs—an extremely shameful job for a Jewish boy since swine were considered unclean animals (Leviticus 11:7–8; Deuteronomy 14:8). Luke tells us that in the muck of the pigpen, when the prodigal was so hungry that he would have gladly eaten pig food, "he came to himself" (15:17). The phrase in Greek (*eis heauton de elthōn*) is completely neutral and bears no connotation of repentance. It simply means that he came to a realization—in this case the realization that his father's workers were better off than he was: "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!" (15:17). The prodigal's realization shows no hint of remorse over the ways he has hurt others, particularly his father. He is focused on filling his stomach and improving his situation.

So he comes up with a plan. "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands'" (15:18–19). The rehearsed speech may be interpreted as cool calculation rather than genuine remorse.³

The prodigal returns home, and while he is still far off, his father sees him and is filled with compassion. He runs to meet him, wraps his arms around him and kisses him. The prodigal begins his rehearsed speech, but doesn't have a chance to finish it. The father calls for the best robe to be put on his son, along with a ring and sandals, and for the fatted calf to be killed for a great celebration.

What about this father? We can understand his joy at his lost son returning home, but really, shouldn't there be some consequences for the boy's actions? What about tough love? Isn't the father allowing himself to be manipulated again? Isn't this a classic example of enabling behavior? The Greek text says that he was "overcome with compassion" (*esplanchnisthē*), a passive verb. It seems that he just can't help himself.

This is how the elder son sees things, and he is thoroughly disgusted. Can we really blame him? After the party has begun, we learn that the elder son was still working out in the fields, "and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on" (15:25–26). The party is in full swing, and the father hasn't even bothered to send someone to find his elder son and invite him to the party! The dutiful, hard-working son has to find out what is happening by asking one of the slaves. After learning that his brother has returned home and his father has killed the fatted calf (or as Juel was fond of saying, the "4-H calf"), he is "overcome with anger" (*ōrgisthē*, another passive verb) and refuses to go in to the party.

The father comes out to plead with his elder son to join the celebration,

and his son responds with what Juel called "the lament of the responsible child":

Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him! (15:29–30)

Can't we feel the elder son's righteous indignation? It's simply not fair!

And here we get to the heart of the matter: the inherent unfairness of family life. We have all seen it happen. It is the problem child in the family who inevitably gets the most attention, while responsible children are often taken for granted. We see the same dynamics at work in the church and other organizations, as well as in society as a whole. The responsible people upon whom any community or organization depends—and without whom its operations would come to a grinding halt—are usually taken for granted. Meanwhile a disproportionate share of collective energy and resources are invested in the least deserving: for example, in trying to stop criminal behavior and dealing with those who break the law.

The father in the story seems to reward irresponsible behavior by throwing a lavish party for his reckless son. He does not take time to assess the genuineness of the prodigal's repentance or see whether his behavior will truly change. In this sense, the father's actions also seem irresponsible, even dangerous.

The elder son's anger and resentment are perfectly understandable. He is absolutely "right" in his concern for fairness and responsibility. In his "rightness," is he not like many of the people in our church pews? They are the responsible, hard-working volunteers, the faithful givers without whom the church's ministries would not hap-

pen. These same people also tend to be law-abiding, responsible members of society without whom our communities would fall apart.

Deep down, we responsible people understand the elder son's lament. Deep down, we resent God's graciousness to the irresponsible. In theory, we understand that God's grace, by definition, has nothing to do with the worthiness of the recipients, yet somehow we still like to think that we are more worthy recipients than others.

If any true "prodigals" or high-risk sinners come near our churches, how do we respond? Do we welcome them with open arms or keep a wary distance? Are we willing to take the risks that Jesus takes in welcoming sinners and eating with them? Or do we circle the wagons to protect ourselves from the potentially unscrupulous?

If the prodigal is not sincere in his repentance, then the father in the story is in fact being manipulated and the prodigal is taking advantage of his father's compassion. This means the father keeps wasting his love and resources on this undeserving son and, quite frankly, it makes the father look foolish.

The great scandal of the parable—and the scandal of Jesus' ministry—is that God is willing to risk such vulnerability. God is willing to risk looking foolish. Like the farmer who scatters seed on the path, the rocky ground, and among the thorns as well as on the good soil (Luke 8:4–8), God is willing to risk "wasting" divine love on the unworthy. God is willing to risk being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous and being condemned by the righteous. In Jesus, God is willing to risk even the shame and humiliation of the cross.

The father responds to his elder son's lament by saying, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (15:31–32). Can't you see that this is *your* brother? Can't you understand the risk I must

take to restore *our* family?

Will the elder son be set free from his captivity to resentment? Will he finally join in the celebration? The story ends without telling us. And what about the Pharisees, whose grumbling Jesus addresses in this parable? Will they be set free to join in the celebration of God's gracious welcome to sinners?

For most of the Jewish religious leaders, the answer was a decisive "no." They decided that Jesus was too dangerous to be tolerated and had to be put to death. Yet Luke's portrayal of the Pharisees is more sympathetic than that of the other three Gospel writers. In Luke, the Pharisees do not participate in the plot to kill Jesus. It is the chief priests and their scribes who conspire against him (20:19; 22:2). Herod also conspires, and some Pharisees even warn Jesus of Herod's plot to kill him (13:31). Jesus also shares a Sabbath meal at the home of a leader of the Pharisees (14:1), where he tells a parable about the peril of rejecting an invitation to the great banquet (14:15–24).

As the story continues in Acts, we learn that some Pharisees become followers of Jesus (Acts 15:5). And of course, there is the dramatic transformation of that most zealous of Pharisees: Saul, the persecutor of the church, becomes Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 9).

In the story of Luke-Acts we see that it is possible for those held captive by their own sense of justice to be set free, but it will take Jesus' death and resurrection to make it happen. Liberation is possible only because God will not take "no" for an answer. God responds to the human rejection of Jesus by raising him from the dead (Acts 2:22–24, 32–36; 3:13–15) and by sending the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' disciples for witness, opens their eyes and hearts, and kindles faith.

What about all of us responsible children today? Will we be set free from our bondage to resentment? Will we welcome the sinner and celebrate God's extravagant grace? Will we join

in the party?

Certainly we cannot free ourselves. Our only hope is that God will not take "no" for an answer. Our only hope is that God will not give up on us responsible children, just as God will not give up on the prodigals. The story ends not with the elder son's lament, but with the father's gracious words: "Child, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (15:31–32).

Our inheritance as God's children is always pure gift, and God keeps welcoming all to the party. *LF*

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Notes

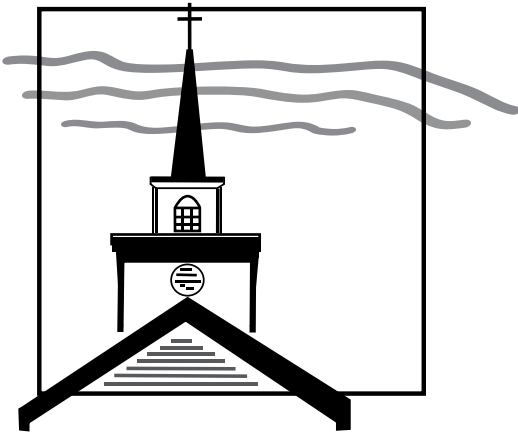
1. Among Juel's published books and articles there are a few discussions of Luke 15:11–32. The first appears in his early book, *Luke-Acts: The Promise of History* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), 38–9, 88–9. The second, originally presented at the 1991 Frederick Neumann Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture, was published in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin Supplementary Issue No. 2* (1992): 56–70. His essay, "The Lord's Prayer in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke," in *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer*, ed. Daniel Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), discusses "the lament of the responsible child" in the context of what it means to pray to God as "Father." Juel also discusses the parable in his article, "The Strange Silence of the Bible," *Interpretation* 51 (1997): 5–19, as an example of the importance of oral/aural performance of Scripture to interpretation.

2. Scribes were not a party within Judaism but professional scholars and specialists in interpreting the law. Pharisees, Sadducees, and the chief priests all had scribes associated with them. See Calvin Roetzel, *The World that Shaped the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 46–49.

3. Juel was fond of pointing out that the Scriptures were meant to be read aloud, not silently. In "performing" this parable, he would take particular delight in voicing the prodigal's speech in a disingenuous, calculating way. Many students found it unsettling that a shift in tone of voice could alter the meaning so drastically.

EXPLODING THE MYTH OF THE BOAT

Mark A. Granquist



When contemporary American Lutherans get around to discussing the topic of evangelism within their denominations, the mood of the conversation usually turns gloomy. It is common to hear that Lutherans cannot do, or have never been able to do, significant evangelistic work. It is claimed that Lutherans only ever grew in this country due to immigration, and that once “the boat” stopped coming, Lutherans stagnated because they had never learned to reach out with the gospel to others.

This is what I call the “myth of the boat,” which is not only wrong but destructive to the possibilities of the future for American Lutherans. On the contrary, American Lutherans had a vigorous program of evangelistic outreach through most of their history and learned how to do this to a large extent through interaction with other American Protestants. It has only really been since the 1960s that American Lutherans lost their habits of evangelism, in the confusion of the era and with the idea that it might not be right to “push” our religious views on others.

There were two periods of significant Lutheran immigration to North America, the first a migration of German Lutherans during the colonial period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then a much larger European Lutheran immigration from 1840 to 1920. American Lutheranism naturally grew during these centuries, and by 1900 Lutherans (as a denominational family) were the fourth largest Protestant group in the United States. By 1935 there were about 3.5 million American Lutherans, a figure that jumped to nearly eight million American Lutherans by 1960. This figure of eight million American Lutherans remained stagnant through the end of the twentieth century, and has declined since then; in terms of the total U.S. population, the “market share” of American Lutheranism has declined by nearly 40% in the last fifty years.

It is important to note that American Lutheranism more than doubled in membership after 1920, *after* the era of

mass immigration came to an end. Certainly a significant portion of this growth could be attributed to demographic factors, but this cannot fully explain American Lutheran growth up to 1960 and its lack of growth since then.

The “myth of the boat” seriously distorts the work of American Lutherans in the nineteenth century to reach out and gather in the immigrant population. This myth assumes that a large percentage of those who emigrated from Lutheran countries in Europe automatically entered the American Lutheran congregations, as if they got off the boat and immediately went to seek out the nearest Lutheran church. On the contrary, the ingathering of Lutheran immigrants to the United States was difficult and anything but automatic, in any sense. Beyond the extreme weakness of the immigrant Lutheran denominations and their chronic lack of pastors and congregations, many emigrants from

American Lutheranism more than doubled in membership after 1920, after the era of mass immigration came to an end.

Lutheran countries were hardly eager to join an American Lutheran congregation, or any congregation, for that matter. Even further, the entire concept of having actively to join and financially to support a congregation was tremendously foreign to these immigrants and a huge hurdle to those seeking to gather them in. Though some immigrants came to America for freedom of religion, many others came to America for freedom *from* religion, especially the state church Lutheranism of Europe.

It is hard to know overall exactly what percentage of immigrant Lutherans actually joined the immigrant Lutheran denominations in the United States, but in some cases we have an idea that the percentages were rather low. In comparing the Scandinavian-American Lutheran denominations with census data from the 1920 census, for example, it is clear that only a minority of these ethnic immigrants and their offspring actually affiliated with these denominations. The figure ranges from about 29% of Norwegian-Americans to 17% of Swedish-Americans and about 9% of Danish Americans, far less than the dreamy haze of ethnic memory would admit. As low as

these figures are, however, they would be even much lower if it were not for the strenuous efforts of ethnic pastors and congregations to reach out to the immigrant populations, gathering in as many of them as their limited resources would allow.

The initial lesson in evangelism that American Lutherans would learn was to adapt their theological and ecclesiastical traditions to the bizarre world of American voluntary religion, in all its pluralistic glory. The voluntary character of religion in America meant that no religious support would be forthcoming from the government, nor would there be any social or political compulsion to be religious. This was a tremendous shift for immigrant Lutheran leaders, who were now forced to develop arguments and reasons that these immigrants ought, in fact, join their congregations and help pay for them. In this sense they had to evangelize their ethnic compatriots all over again and provide them with a coherent argument about why they ought to join or even remain Christian at all. Further, Lutheran leaders had to develop the patterns and means of taking these arguments out to a scattered and fragmented immigrant population. This was a task of herculean proportions, and that the immigrant denominations grew as fast as they actually did is a testimony to the dedication and perseverance of many of the American Lutheran leaders.

In fact, many of the Lutheran pastors who came to North America were trained as missionaries, saw this continent as a huge mission field, and always assumed that the immigrants they served needed to be, in this sense, evangelized. Up through the end of the nineteenth century, American Lutheran pastors adopted the habits of missions and evangelism, personally setting up new satellite congregations around the ones they were serving and going off on mission trips to areas that were not yet served by their denomination. This they did often out of their own initiative and habits of evangelism that were deeply

ingrained in them. Though much of the credit for this evangelistic activity was due to individual entrepreneurial pastors, their efforts were strongly encouraged by the nascent denominational structures, which were beginning to develop evangelism strategies within their own organizations, such as boards of home missions. More than this, however, these immigrant Lutheran denominations sought to develop an entire internal culture of

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evangelism by lifting up and modeling these missionary pastors as exemplars.

Certainly, the bulk of these nineteenth century Lutheran evangelistic efforts was chiefly focused on a particular group of ethnic immigrants and done primarily in the immigrant language. But by adapting to the American religious culture, and by practicing the habits of evangelism and outreach, these immigrant denominations were developing the habits of evangelism that would stand

them in good stead into the first half of the twentieth century. When they began to make the transition to the use of the English language (for colonial Lutherans, around 1800, and for later immigrants after World War I), they continued these habits of evangelism and borrowed even more from their American religious counterparts. Eastern colonial Lutherans, especially in the North, borrowed widely from the revival movements of the Second Great Awakening (in the early nineteenth century), and Lutheran revivalism was widespread before the Civil War. When later immigrants made their transition to the use of English during the interwar years, they too adapted the evangelistic methods of their American Protestant counterparts, including national boards of evangelism to coordinate efforts, the commissioning of regular home missionaries, the development of materials and procedures for evangelism, and the attempt to inculcate a habit of evangelical outreach among pastors and laypeople.

During the period from 1920 to 1945 these efforts were hindered, first of all, by a lack of funds during the Depression and then by a lack of personnel during World War II. The great internal upheavals of that war, with a massive relocation of Americans to serve the war effort, had Lutheran denominations straining to serve a dispersed population in the military camps and new settlements of war workers. Much of this new outreach was coordinated on the national level by new cooperative Lutheran structures, such as the National Lutheran Council and the Synodical Conference, which sought to unify and maximize the efforts of individual American Lutheran denominations. This work on the denominational and national level was modeled on other Protestant efforts, and often in consultation with them.

The experiences of the early twentieth century came to a crescendo in the decades after 1945, as the national migrations of the postwar period

continued and the exploding populations of the baby boom generation swelled the development of new suburban areas across America. Having developed the habits and machinery of evangelism during the preceding years, American Lutherans went on a torrent of expansion after World War II, starting congregations by the thousands and drawing in impressive numbers of new members. Lutheranism expanded to new areas of the United States, especially the South, Southwest, and West. While many of these new congregations were probably filled with migrating Lutherans from elsewhere, there was also a number of members who came new to the Lutheran tradition during this period. Seminarians and pastors were trained in the practical elements of evangelism and were expected to go out into the community, ring doorbells, and invite people to worship in their congregations. Lay persons were given similar encouragement to contact those around them and invite them to church. There was a culture of evangelism that was supported in the denominational press, which lifted up the examples of growing congregations around the country.

And then all this momentum came to an end, or at least to a greatly diminished level, beginning in the late 1960s. The Lutheran push toward evangelism slowed dramatically, beginning with a numerical stagnation and then leading toward actual numerical decline in the late twentieth century. What happened? It is hard to know completely and exactly what happened, but there are some areas of explanation that seem to point toward this decline.

First, there seems to have been the loss of a culture of evangelism within Lutheran denominations. Somehow the goal of evangelism as being

incumbent on individual pastors, members, and congregations diminished in importance as the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s gained traction. The importance of winning souls and proclaiming the gospel to new people lost out to the attempt to make the Christian church relevant to the social problems of the day. An entire new generation of pastors and of systems of seminary education seems to have downplayed traditional evangelism in favor of a social gospel.

Second, there was a gradual decline in the support of national denominational structures for evangelism. Partially this was perhaps due to the endless rounds of merger and restructuring of American Lutheran denominations (outside of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) after World War II, when familiar patterns of support for evangelism work were disrupted and restructured. There was, too, a loss of the original entrepreneurial zeal of local pastors for such effort, with them perhaps assuming that it was the job of the national denominational structures to initiate and coordinate evangelism efforts. Boards and structures that had been doing evangelism efforts were sometimes combined with other agencies, with a resulting loss of focus.

Third, the forms of church planting and evangelism were becoming much more expensive by the end of the twentieth century. Much of the previous work had been done by means of low-cost and very flexible means—pastors were cheap and so were land and buildings. But with the professionalization of the clergy, and the rising costs associated with them (not to mention the land and buildings), it became much more expensive to start a mission congregation and to support them, in some cases into the millions of dollars. Local congregations were

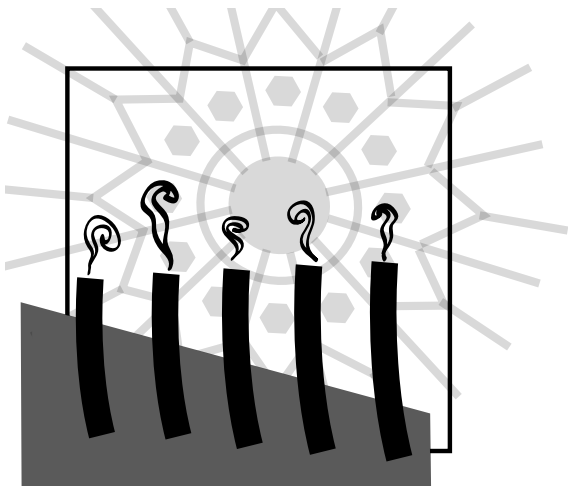
now much less likely to begin new mission congregations unilaterally.

Finally, and most troubling, is the seeming loss of the idea that evangelistic efforts were even appropriate—the loss of Lutheran confidence in the proclamation of the gospel to others. In an increasingly pluralistic America, with its huge variety of different religious groups, it seems that some Lutherans had come to the conclusion that it was not appropriate to attempt to make new Christians out of those populations. This is extremely difficult to pin down, but it seems that there was an important and very troubling shift in this area, even if the parameters of that shift are not clear. Did American Lutherans lose their core message?

The history is clear—American Lutherans can do evangelism and have done so very well in the past, sometimes with spectacular results. They have reached out to the world around them and their church has grown. This did not happen automatically—it certainly did not happen simply because boats showed up with millions of European Lutheran immigrants. American Lutherans worked hard and developed an impressive record of evangelism. Perhaps it was thought that this would go on forever, or perhaps Lutherans lost the courage of their convictions. Whatever it was, they have seemingly lost their habits of evangelism, and their zeal for it, with disastrous results.

If, however, one would seek models for twenty-first century American Lutheran evangelism, one might do well to look to the American Lutheran past and to the models of evangelistic work contained therein. *LF*

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LONGING FOR THE LONGEST CREED

Robert Saler

One of my most vivid memories from my early days of graduate school is of the first day of a course on the theology of the Trinity. The professor, whose erudition concerning patristic and medieval theology was matched only by the subversive dryness of his humor, strode into class, set down his notes, and addressed us with these words: “Friends, I am here today to explain to you why you are all Sabellian modalists... and I am not.”

I had enough vague recollections of previous church history classes to remember that Sabellianism—the belief that the one God is not inherently triune in the sense of having three persons but is rather one essence who appears in three different modes throughout salvation history—had been decisively condemned by nascent orthodox theologians of the patristic period. But while my formal education had given me sufficient information about the character of this and other heresies, I struggled to recall what I had really been taught about the Trinity by the various ELCA congregations that formed me in the faith. What was the content of the preaching, catechesis, normative declarations about the Trinity? Had I truly been taught orthodoxy, or was my professor right in suspecting that my church’s “working” theology of the Trinity as manifested in its preaching and liturgical practices was amorphous, bordering on the heretical? Would such teaching enable me to resist the unconscious influence of trinitarianisms vastly inferior to the magnificent achievements of Tertullian, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine?

In truth, when the Trinity was preached in church at all, often it was preached anemically. There were all those Trinity Sunday sermons that invariably proclaimed, “The Trinity is a mystery, no one really understands it, early Christians quibbled over it for some strange reason, but I guess we believe it anyway.” There was the Bible study mentality, still common in many congregations, that takes *sola scriptura* to mean the church catholic’s two-thousand year history of exegetical theology is either superfluous or misleading when it comes to understanding, say, the gospel

narratives. There were Sunday School curricula admirably concerned with how I could live out my personal faith in Jesus in the “real world,” but gave me no clue that “today’s challenges” are in fact quite similar to those of centuries past.

But then... there was that one creed.

That long, long creed buried somewhere in the hymnal but nevertheless dusted off and hauled out sometimes, usually on Trinity Sunday. The one that took almost fifteen minutes to recite, which meant either the sermon had to be shorter (a rare occurrence) or some of the hymns had to be trimmed. The one that seemed a lot less upbeat and much more severe (even threatening) than the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds. The one that went into excruciating detail about exactly what we were supposed to be thinking about the Trinity and the incarnation. I may not have been raised knowing all the subtleties of orthodox trinitarian theology. But because of that one strange creed and that one strange Sunday, I did get the sense that my church knew what it believed about the Trinity.

There may be plenty of ELCA congregations where Christians young and old are being formed through the liturgical and catechetical experience of the Athanasian Creed. However, the evidence is disheartening. The creed is nowhere to be found in the new ELCA hymnal *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and I have not recited it in worship (even at seminary!) since I was a teenager. Meanwhile, the signs that Sabellianism has never really left us are evident throughout both academic theology¹ and church practice, most notably in the continuing modalist tendency to gloss “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” functionally as “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.”² If one is to judge by the theology evident in the day-to-day intellectual, liturgical, and spiritual life of the ELCA, then the presence of the Athanasian Creed seems close to nil.

The decision of the compilers of ELW to exclude the Athanasian Creed from the hymnal is particularly disheartening in light of the fact that significant strands of

“Friends, I am here today to explain to you why you are all Sabellian modalists... and I am not.”

American Lutheranism have heretofore made a point of including it. While by no means every American Lutheran hymnal has included this creed (for instance, it is absent from

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the 1917 *Common Service Book* and the 1930 *American Lutheran Hymnal*), several major predecessors to ELW—including the 1941 *Lutheran Hymnal* and the 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, as well as Wisconsin Synod titles—resisted the temptation to let the creed fall away from the liturgical life of the community by including it, sometimes with explicit permission for its liturgical use on Trinity Sunday.³ Many American Lutheran congregations thus had official sanction, if not encouragement, for incorporating the creed into their liturgical life by means of a practice with roots reaching back to the Middle Ages. Even those hymnals which did not provide explicit rubrics for the creed's liturgical use still made a positive statement of the creed's catechetical and theological value by enshrining it within their pages.

To be fair, there are several legitimate reasons why the Quicumque (as scholars generally call it, from the first word of its original Latin text, since it was certainly not composed by Athanasius), has such a marginal status in American Lutheranism. Only a liturgical masochist would deny that its length makes it unwieldy for a typical worship service. Further, its prose (in English translation, at least) lacks some of the evocative imagery found in the shorter creeds. As J. N. D. Kelly states in his magisterial study of the document, "The creed hammers its points home in short, didactic phrases, and there is an entire absence of rhetori-

cal trimmings."⁴ More disturbingly, its strict and unambiguous damnatory clauses, which explicitly deny the possibility of salvation to those who do not hold to its specific formulations of trinitarian and christological doctrine, run contrary both to contemporary sensibilities and to the Lutheran insistence that salvation does not come by human works, including the "work" of acquiescence to theological or doctrinal propositions. Any Lutheran advocating for the continued presence of the creed in the liturgical and theological life of the ELCA must take these concerns seriously.

But while these obstacles are real, they are not insurmountable. While partisans of the creed such as myself might be tempted to rely solely on tradition and historical precedent in asserting the importance of the Quicumque for Lutherans (after all, it was explicitly included in the Book of Concord as one of the three creeds by which the churches of the Augsburg Confession understood themselves to be constituted), there are also compelling theological reasons for retaining the creed in both worship and teaching.

It is certainly the case that there are substantial gaps both between the patristic period and the Reformation and between the creed's sensibilities and most contemporary mindsets when it comes to threatening damnation for heretics. As Kelly remarks, "when we study [the damnatory clauses] of the creed, we should remember that the ancient church had a confident dogmatism which had little use for the scruples which trouble us."⁵ Moreover, as much as the Reformation understood itself to be in continuity with early church orthodoxy, its insistence upon salvation by grace through faith alone (and, perhaps, its willingness to occupy the position of "heresy" for the sake of the gospel) does posit at least a *prima facie* challenge to the strict divide between orthodoxy and heresy presupposed by the Quicumque. Speaking as a Lutheran who does not believe that humans have epistemological or theo-

logical warrant to declare the heretics of a given era to be outside the possibility of God's gracious salvation, the effect of both of these gaps is theologically and spiritually grating. To encounter the Athanasian Creed is to encounter a piety that is, in many respects, both alien and offensive. And to speak it, particularly in the context of worship, is to exacerbate the alterity and the scandal.

That being acknowledged, what theological justifications remain for retaining the creed as a presence in the life of the Lutheran church? Can there be any value in encountering a creed in the teaching or even the liturgy of a congregation, if large segments of that congregation cannot assent to all of its features? I would suggest that it is precisely because the Quicumque provokes such an unsettling encounter between the fidelity of the early church and our contemporary mindsets that retention of the creed is so vital. This is true for several reasons.

First, the creed reminds us that, while Lutherans assert that it is faith that justifies us, we also believe that the faith to which we are called has a *content* and not simply a form. Were one to deny this by claiming, explicitly or implicitly, that the grace of the Holy Spirit calls us to the "life"

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or form of faith without any specific theological content, then such a denial would constitute a definitive departure from the theologically "thick" faith of the Reformers and the church with which they understood themselves to be in continuity. Such a mentality

would exacerbate the unfortunate tendency of many Christians to proclaim that we are saved through faith without further specifying what that faith asserts about itself. The Athanasian Creed is one of the church catholic's most powerful statements that the faith to which grace calls us is faith in the God of Abraham, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It declares that Christian faith is faith in the Trinity.⁶ The Lutheran insistence upon *sola fide* does not erase the so-called "scandal of particularity." If anything, *sola fide* revels in particularity. So does the creed, and in that sense it is a very Lutheran-friendly document.

Second, the creed's linkage of orthodox trinitarianism to soteriology reminds us that, as Christians, we believe that salvation itself is a trinitarian process. As a good deal of profound theological work associated with the trinitarian revival in academic theology has reminded us,⁷ the salvation history into which God's grace invites us is constituted in and through the outworking of the Trinity in history—in our history. To be a Christian is to take up (or better, to be given) a position within a triune story of cosmic redemption. Whatever the effect of the Athanasian Creed's strictures upon contemporary ears, its prose establishes an uncompromising link between the reality of the Trinity and the nature of Christian salvation. Exposure to such a link can only be salutary for the church of all times and places.⁸

Finally, it is precisely the alien character of the creed's orthodoxy which reminds a church body that is ostensibly committed to "diversity" that opening our doors to the witness of those who would challenge us by their presence does not only mean expansion of the congregation of the living, but also entails opening ourselves to the witness of the saints who have gone before us in the faith. Talk of "diversity" and "welcoming the other" means nothing if this does not include giving the treasures of

our own theological heritage a place within our worship and our teaching. Such welcome is, like the eucharist, a performative enactment of the communion of saints.

Moreover, the didactic nature of the creed provides us with a prime liturgical opportunity not only to welcome but also to *learn* vis-à-vis the saints of the past, present, and eschatological future. To recite the Athanasian creed is not simply to make assertions about what the church believes. It is also to place ourselves in a stance of receptivity towards the church's past in all its irreducible otherness. It's one thing to welcome the other; it's another thing entirely to ask the other to teach you. Here lies a profound juxtaposition of worshipful assertion and humbling education. As with most educational settings, we may decide to reject all or part of the claims being presented to us; however, such liturgical "dissonance" is not necessarily a defect in the experience. Indeed, the dissonance might well be part of the experience's value, since it would push the worshiping body to clarify its own working trinitarian theology.

I've always felt that orthodoxy, at its best, should inspire a slightly rebellious streak when it comes to following the spirit of an age. So, if the spirit of our age would have us relegate the Athanasian Creed to the dustbins of catechetical and liturgical history, then perhaps the best thing for a congregation seeking to encounter the tradition in all its strange glory would be an occasional subversive welcome of the creed into its teaching, preaching, and liturgy. Whether or not we affirm all that the saints have to teach us, if we refuse to let them speak to us, we impoverish the faith that has come before us and diminish our ability to hand it on to those who come after.

LF

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Notes

1. Not to mention the recurrence of the tritheism (the Creed's other target), discernible in the contemporary enthusiasm for arguments against monotheism and in favor of "divine multiplicity."

2. This piece of modalism is all the more vexing since it completely obscures the fact that, according to both the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Colossians, it is the second and not the first person of the Trinity who is the primary agent of creation.

3. For a helpful account of the various debates surrounding the creed's inclusion in the LBW, see Ralph W. Quere, *In the Context of Unity: A History of the Development of the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2003).

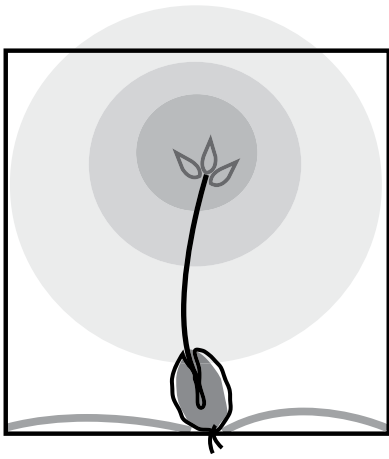
4. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 66. Kelly's book remains the single best source both for surveying various authorship theories around the creed as well as its history in church usage.

5. *Ibid.*, 72.

6. I say this with the awareness that several branches of the church, including "Oneness" Pentecostalism, largely disavow the Trinity as it is understood by the creeds. To this I can only repeat that I do not believe that the church should view departure from orthodoxy as departure from the possibility of salvation; however, this theologically warranted humility does not and should not deter the church from establishing the determinate character of its own teachings.

7. See, *inter alia*, Robert Jenson's *The Trinitarian Identity: God according to the Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002); David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993); and Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

8. Having made this comment about the universality of the creed's value, I must acknowledge the fact that many Orthodox Christians regard the Quicumque with suspicion or even dismissal because of its insistence upon the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son. The filioque issue remains a painful one for the church, and should the various western communions ever revisit the matter with sufficient seriousness, the Athanasian Creed (like the Nicene) would certainly be one of the documents that might require revision. However, since that time has not yet come, there is no reason for the western church not to enjoy the fruits of its own heritage.



HOW TO REVIVE A DYING PARISH

Brad Hales

The figures seem ominous. Over 70% of Lutheran churches have plateaued in membership or are declining. The average age of a Lutheran congregant is about sixty. In the ELCA, 28% percent of the national membership worships on any given Sunday morning. Why? Has the present culture wrought havoc on the church's mission in the world? Has the church failed to be relevant to the complexities of today's society? Have the darkness and the demonic so hardened hearts that there is less response to the gospel? Have church leaders lost their zeal and passion for sharing the good news? Have congregations become lukewarm in their knowledge of God's word and the Lutheran Confessions, which in turn, has stifled their enthusiasm for Christ and his church? The reasons proffered are many. But what should be the response? Will the church continue to operate with "business as usual," floundering through the stormy waves of an unpredictable culture? Or will it stand firm upon the transforming power of God's word, renewing and reviving to be a clear witness to Jesus the savior?

Through the years American churches have employed differing evangelical methods to promote both numerical and devotional growth. The Church Growth Movement focused on getting as many people as possible to fill the pews. If this meant using media, music, and microphones, so be it. We were told to follow the successful pioneers in the field such as Willow Creek, Saddleback, and the Community Church of Joy. As long as we attended their conferences and adopted their cookie-cutter approaches, the people would come. But that did not always happen. These national models for ministry neglected regional and local needs. And even when we had individuals come through the front door, they quickly left again through the back door. In our zeal to have people attend, we neglected to provide them depth in both the teaching of God's word and the Confessions. Further, we did not always identify people's spiritual gifts and use these gifts for the furtherance of the kingdom.

If congregational renewal is not strictly centered upon God's word, sharing Jesus Christ as savior, there cannot be long-lasting revival.

Other evangelistic models had their day in the sun, too. Entertainment evangelism centered on an MTV-type of worship experience. If we could entertain people, we reasoned, they would certainly be attracted to the gospel. This evangelistic endeavor may have included starting new, alternative worship experiences, the use of electronic instruments or lighting, and the institution of dramatic presentations within the worship encounter.

Marketing evangelism was the use of mass media to share the good news. This could include television commercials, radio spots, websites, social media, print publications, or glossy mailings to the local community. One Christmas, the church where I served sent out hundreds of postcards to the nearby zip code zones, inviting residents to Christmas Eve worship. I actually saw people walking into the building with the postcards in hand. One attendee even waved the card in the air and said, "Is this my ticket to come in?"

Still another form of outreach was target evangelism, the intentional targeting of a specific group for evangelistic purposes. Several years ago I was the part of a congregation that was awarded a fast growth grant from the ELCA to call part-time staff to help nurture the spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation. Once the grant commenced, I received a three-ring binder from the ELCA's division of outreach with specific information on how to invite gay and lesbian families into the parish; one of the suggestions was to place a rainbow flag in front of the church. This is an example of target evangelism.

These evangelism models have certainly brought seekers into the church. But have they substantially renewed and revived the local body of Christ? I don't believe so. If congregational renewal is not strictly centered upon God's word, sharing Jesus Christ as savior, there cannot be long-lasting revival. More seriously, if a parish is dying, it often means there has been resistance to faith development and authentic mission. So when a process for congregational transformation begins, it must be understood—and

said aloud—that the participants are entering a period of “spiritual warfare.” The forces of darkness and the devil do not want such a church to be resuscitated. Evil will do everything in its power to derail the revitalization. I was once asked to speak to a few Lutheran churches about congregational growth, and I centered my remarks on growing in God’s word and our relationship with Jesus. During a break, one of the participants literally got into my face and demanded that I *stop* talking about Jesus. After the event, a pastor wrote me an incendiary letter, accusing me of being Billy Graham! When I first met the council in my present congregation, I was extremely clear that the demonic would attack the moment they moved from “maintenance” to “mission.” They should expect possible anger, division, and upset at the change of direction. That’s why parish renewal is hard and not for the faint of heart. But the rewards are great. Just imagine how many more people will come to know Jesus Christ as their loving savior. How wonderful it will be to have congregations centered upon God’s living word, serving and sharing Christ with others.

As a pastor involved in redeveloping congregations throughout my career, I’ve learned a few important steps along the way. First and foremost, people’s hearts are only changed by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit. We can only be used as God’s vessels to help bring about change in the kingdom. And the Lord has provided us definite direction on how to do that. It all begins with the spiritual. Long ago, right before I was called to be the pastor of a small, struggling church in central New York state, I learned that there had been a weekly prayer group meeting, praying for revival, growth within the congregation, and for the Spirit to send an evangelical pastor. Prayer is one of the greatest tools for the renewal process. It makes no difference if it’s intercessory prayer, corporate prayer, or healing prayer. Healing prayer has been

a catalyst in the continued revival in my current congregation. Following James 5:13–16, we offer the laying-on of hands and anointing with oil for healing. The great thing about prayer is that it can be incorporated in all aspects of the church’s life. We now have members who will openly pray for others and over the phone.

Another important part of the spiritual is the study and knowledge of holy Scripture. As it is written in II Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” In my New York congregation, I had an eighty-year-old member named Willard. He had been baptized and confirmed and had raised his family in the same church, but never spent much time in biblical study until his later years. One day he pulled me aside and said, “Pastor, I have never learned so much about God’s word and Jesus. It has greatly impacted my life.” During the renewal process, the study of the Scriptures and the Confessions must be paramount, because whenever the Lord’s word goes out, it will never come back empty. It will do something. I realize that not all people may be open to study of the word. In one congregation I served, a church council member publically confessed at a meeting disbelief in the miracles and healings of Jesus as reported in the Scriptures. But that did not deter us! When more individuals are open to God’s word, discipleship grows and the mission of Christ’s church becomes clear.

Pastoral visitation is another vital aspect of congregation revival. Just the other day I visited some new members of the church. These lifelong Lutherans shared with me that this was the first time a pastor had ever visited their home. But visiting with people in their homes, workplaces, health-care facilities, restaurants, and other locations is the lifeblood of ministry where open relationships are built.

It’s a great opportunity to share Jesus and the direction of the church, learn about families, and hear other concerns. For years now we’ve been told that people do not want to be visited in their homes anymore. It is said that individuals value their privacy and detest being intruded upon. I vehemently disagree with that assertion. In this internet, corporate, impersonal age, people crave meaningful real-life contact. They appreciate when someone cares enough to come and listen. If the pastor is not making these visits and developing trust relationships, it’s going to be difficult for the renewal process to gain traction.

Outreach is an essential component of the turnaround church. Years ago, I was part of a team that went door to door in the local village. The purpose of these visits was solely to invite others to worship. I vividly remember one house where I stopped. A woman came to the door with a phone in her hand. She asked if I could wait a moment. Within a few minutes, she came back with a stunned expression upon her face. Tears rolling down her eyes, she shared with me that she’d been on the phone with her brother, praying that the Holy Spirit would lead her to a church where she could worship the Lord! Outreach can happen in many different ways, but the message is still the same: the intentional invitation to worship the living savior Jesus Christ of Nazareth. If the local church is going to be changed, then the members need to invite their friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. This alone will tell you about the health of your present congregation. Ask the current membership why they are inviting others to the church—or why not. This will tell you how people perceive and experience what is happening in the ministry. Jesus invites us to “come and see.” Through outreach, we invite others to “come and see” the Lord Jesus.

As a church begins its journey on the road to transformation road, a significant portion of its task will be connecting with the community.

As the community finds out what is going on in the life of the church, the news will spread like wildfire. So how do you connect? My present parish started out as a small, older congregation, not known in the wider area. On my first Sunday before worship, the Holy Spirit drove me out to the sidewalk in front of the rented building, and I began waving to the passing cars on Main Street. I know this may sound strange and even simplistic, but the Lord blessed this act above all measure. People began to beep their horns and wave at me. Some stopped for prayer and counsel. One man had just come out of the state penitentiary and wondered if he would be welcomed. Many came to worship and have become active disciples in the body. Congregational members now join me on the sidewalk. When our members invite others to worship at Reformation, a typical description of the place is, "That's the church where they wave." This is just one example of connecting with the community. A congregation may decide to have a booth at a town festival or walk in the local parade. Maybe the parish will

be involved in an area-wide service project or have its members sit on governmental boards. The opportunities abound and community connections should be forged.

A final tool for congregational renewal is just plain using what God gave you. When I worked part-time for the Virginia Synod, I would frequently visit congregations in need of revival where I heard people say again and again that the only way the church would grow is if they attracted children, youth, and young families. But that doesn't necessarily follow (or work). In my present congregation, we started with a majority of older adults. So we used what God had given us and began an ecumenical mature adult ministry. We sponsored Bible studies, learning opportunities, speakers, educational trips, fellowship gatherings, and even a senior vacation Bible school for people over fifty. Astonishingly, the more we focused on this ministry, the more the church grew. Older adults joined; we also welcomed baby boomers, younger adults, teens, and children. Instead of wishing for something you don't already have,

make grateful use of the blessings that the Lord has already given you!

Congregational revitalization is extremely difficult. It's not like a light switch that you can flip on just like that. Renewal takes hard work, time, effort, a determination never to give up, and always reliance on Jesus' strength. For years I've heard the sentiment "as long as we are faithful," meaning the basic tasks of preaching the word, celebrating the sacraments, and being open on Sunday as sufficient obedience to God's will. But it should mean so much more. Being faithful participants in Christ's church means confronting the darkness, enthusiastically sharing God's word, serving the living Lord, and intentionally making Jesus known to others. It's expecting that Christ will renew the church.

Many of our Lutheran congregations need revitalized right now. So let us take up the challenge. The power of Jesus Christ will bring about the revival. ✠

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Jesus Christ, Our Great Redeemer

Soprano



1. Je - sus Christ — our great Re - deem - er Who has turned a - way God's
 2. That we ne - ver should for - get — it He gave us his flesh to
 3. Who will draw — near to that ta - ble Must take heed, all they are
 4. God the Fa - ther praise thou du - ly, That he would feed thee so

S



an - ger, Suf - fered death with - out com - plaint —
 eat — it, Hid in bread this gift di - vine. —
 a - ble. Who un - worthy - y thi - ther goes, —
 tru - ly And for ill deeds by thee done —

S



And saved us — from hell's bit - ter pain. —
 Let us drink — his blood in — the wine. —
 Drinks to their — death, not life, — they know. —
 Up un - to — death has giv'n — his Son. —

5. Have this faith, and do not waver,
 It is food for all who crave it,
 Who, their hearts by sin oppressed,
 Can no more for its anguish rest.

6. Such kindness and such grace to get
 Seeks a heart with agony great.
 It is well with thee? Take care,
 Lest thou unknown some evil bear.

7. He doth say, "Come hither to me
 I will heal ye, wholly, truly.
 No physician can heal all
 The sorrows of the suff'ring soul."

8. "Hadst thou any claim to proffer,
 Why for thee should I then suffer?
 This table is not for thee,
 If thou wilt set thine own self free."

9. "If with faith thy heart possesses,
 And the same thy mouth confesses,
 Fit guest then thou art indeed,
 And this food thine own soul will feed."

10. Bear love's fruit, and gladly labor
 Help with love thy needy neighbors
 That food to them thou canst be
 As God Himself is food for thee.

Text: Martin Luther (1483–1546)
 Trans. George MacDonald, alt. (1824–1905)

JESUS CHRISTUS NOSTRA SALUS
 8878



STUDIES IN LUTHER
BROTHER MARTIN,
AUGUSTINIAN FRIAR

Jared Wicks, SJ

This contribution comes from a long-time member of a Catholic religious order who has also carried out research on Luther, his theological teaching, and his reform of the church and of Christian spirituality. Here I invite Lutheran readers to consider with me some little-known aspects of Luther's personal formation and life as a member of the Augustinian order. I do this in order to show some deep roots, precisely in Luther's life as an Augustinian friar, of what he became as he matured as a theologian and then publicly emerged as a church reformer beginning in 1517.

I offer this consideration of Luther as Augustinian friar as something to keep in mind as we approach the fifth centenary, in 2017, of Luther's reforming intervention on indulgences. Some aspects of that intervention, I believe, need reconsideration from the perspective of Luther's being formed spiritually in the Augustinian order.

Five hundred years ago, in early 1508, the twenty-four-year-old Martin Luther was a newly ordained priest and member of the Augustinian Hermits, living with some fifty other Augustinians in the order's house in Erfurt. Martin had gained his M.A. from the University of Erfurt in 1505 and on July 17 of that year had become a postulant seeking entry into the order. Within weeks, in September 1505, Martin began wearing the Augustinian habit and following the program set down for new entrants, or "novices," under the direction of an experienced older Augustinian. This period of trial and early formation ended one year later with his formal incorporation into the order through his profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience according to his order's traditions.

But there is more to the story.

"Friar" and "Friary" as Correct Terms

My title already suggests what may seem an innovation, by speaking of Luther as an "Augustinian friar" while inten-

tionally avoiding the term "monk." I have already made a point of not calling the Erfurt house a "monastery." These latter terms occur regularly in biographies of Luther and in accounts of his passage to the Reformation, but their use does not stand up to closer historical examination. To speak of Luther as once being "a monk" who experienced "monastic life," even "monastic silence," is not correct historically, in spite of such terms being widespread in works on him and on the history of the Reformation.¹ Luther himself did use this terminology, but historical accuracy demands that we today understand more precisely what he meant. Our incorrect terminology obscures from our sight the roots of what Luther became and what he gave to the church and the world.

Luther was a "friar," and his first Augustinian residence in Erfurt was a "friary," in conformity with the standard terminology concerning religious orders in the Christian west.² The "monastic" orders of "monks," in the western Christian tradition, are the Benedictines, Cistercians, Carthusians, and Trappists, who

take their ideals of life from St. Benedict and his Rule in the early sixth century. These are "monks," in the proper sense of the term, and their residences are correctly called "monasteries." But the thirteenth century saw the foundation of several new and quite different religious orders, the "mendicant" orders of preaching friars, such as the Dominicans, Franciscans, and, yes, the Augustinian "Hermit Friars."³ The communities of these mendicants did not hold tracts of land from which revenue accrued for their support, as did most monastic orders, but they were instead dependent on alms given to them as beggars (*mendicantes*) by those to whom they preached and ministered in other ways.

The Augustinians first came together in Tuscany under the approval of Pope Alexander IV in 1256. Their connection with St. Augustine lay in their adoption of the rule of life attributed to St. Augustine. Naturally, the North African doctor's writings on God's grace as well as his Scripture commentaries became objects of special study and

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interpretation, leaving many marks on the preaching carried out by the members of the order that began bearing Augustine's name.

The Augustinian Order's Spirituality

The new thirteenth-century orders did not seek out the rural isolation of most monasteries of the older orders. The latter had sought quiet locales to ward off disturbances of their rounds of the liturgical hours and their work, whether manual or intellectual. But the new orders gravitated to the cities, aiming to become a leaven in the urban life of late medieval Europe. This was true of the Augustinians, in spite of their carrying with them, as a historical, institutional recollection of their beginning, the name of "Hermits." Along with their other thirteenth-century foundations, their community life was ordered by a routine of common prayer, largely the recitation of the Psalms. But this differed from properly monastic prayer, for the friars' prayer aimed to support and animate their ministry, especially that of preaching to townspeople. The Erfurt Augustinians, we know, not only preached to citizens of Erfurt in their friary church, but they also cared for thirteen chapels outside the city. In the city and its surroundings, they passed on their spirituality to the members of three lay confraternities based at the Erfurt friary.

A person enters a religious order, both in Luther's day and in our own, to be personally formed in a particular Christian spiritual tradition, embracing a characteristic ideal and method of personal prayer, of disciplined living, and—outside the strictly monastic orders—of a ministry shaped in a way unique to the order. The handing-on of the order's ideals, thus, does not reach its end in the devout spiritual life of the well-formed member but leads to further communication in the church and the world. This point, too, is rarely noted in biographies of Luther. Members of the orders of preaching friars are bearers for the

benefit of others, even of the whole church, of a way of prayer and life shaped by the founder. Formation in the spirituality of the order was a personal enrichment of the member's life, but what the member received was also to be given to others, to be communicated in the ministries staffed by the members of the friary. They lived under the rule of Jesus' word, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

The Dominican ideal of ministry links contemplation with the handing on to others of the fruits gained in contemplative prayer. The Jesuit ideal, forged in the sixteenth century, highlights missionary availability and mobility in order to serve anywhere, especially for the cultural advance-

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ment of people through education. But what about the Augustinians?

The best research on the Hermit Friars of St. Augustine indicates the prevalence of a spirituality animated by the image of the first Jerusalem community, as described in Acts 2:42. The elements, thus, are "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers." The primary trait of Luther's order was not solitude in monastic prayer and silent work but instead brotherhood in community. The Augustinians, like the Franciscans, called each other "brother" (*frater*, from which comes "friar"). But this community life pointed beyond the confines of the friary, for it looked to spill over for the benefit of lay people by means of the friars' pastoral outreach, both in Erfurt and in the surrounding area.

The fraternal common life of the friars was to set an example of Christian community for Erfurt's citizens and for men and women living in the villages around the city. The lifestyle of the Augustinians, thus, aimed to foster a concentrated ethos and a spiritual milieu in the friary, which would enrich the whole area in which they ministered.⁴

Scripture as the Source of the Augustinian Life—and Luther's

In the Augustinian order's official documents, the source of their spirit and spirituality was in fact Holy Scripture. The Augustinian rule of the life, that is, the order's Constitutions, had been formulated in the late thirteenth century and passed on in manuscript copies. But they were printed for the first time in Nürnberg in 1505 or 1506 when Luther's sometime-mentor, Johann von Staupitz, was beginning to govern many of the order's houses in Germany. The Augustinians' Constitutions, in fact, recently came out as part of Staupitz's collected works, and so their Latin text can be consulted without great difficulty.

In the Constitutions, chapter 17 is of special importance for understanding Luther's earliest formation, since it sketches the program of education for life in the order that was given to new novices under the direction of the novice master. Here we have the official account of the guidance that Martin Luther was receiving in 1505–1506. Among other aspects, it lays down this far-reaching guideline that "the novice is to read Scripture avidly, hear it devoutly, and fervently lay hold of it," so as to be imbued with the biblical message and biblical content.⁵ This prescription, we can be sure, had a personal and lasting impact on Luther during 1505–1506, when he was a novice in Erfurt.

Luther's Table Talk includes an account of how, before entering the friary, he had one day come upon a Bible, most likely a copy of the Latin Vulgate, in the university library, and

he began reading it with no little fascination. Luther found a freshness and vigor in Scripture that was lacking in his university studies. We know that the University of Erfurt at the time offered a program centered on the works of scholastic masters such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Luther said that when they mentioned Scripture, their interpretations of texts in fact came from the philosophy of Aristotle.⁶

When Luther became an Augustinian novice, as he recalled several times,

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he was given a Bible, a Vulgate with a red cover, which he read and reread with delight, even memorizing whole passages. In this, we know now, he was only carrying out what was prescribed for his order's novices. When Luther passed from being a novice to his life as a vowed friar, he had to hand in the Bible for use by another novice. But in his free time he regularly went to the friary library to read further in a copy of Scripture. He quickly gained no small expertise with the Bible, being able to find texts and phrases quickly. His confreres dubbed him the *textualis* (the "text man"), who could supply precise biblical terms and verses in the midst of discussions. At times, Luther relates, an especially meaningful verse would occupy his thoughts for the whole of the day.⁷

In Luther's recollections of his early Bible reading, he mentions Johann von Staupitz, who had held the chair of Scripture study at the new University of Wittenberg. But Staupitz left this post when he was elected the Vicar of the Augustinian Superior General

for the governance of some thirty friaries in Germany. Luther mentioned that Staupitz used his authority to order that in these houses, the Bible was to be read while the friars took their meals in silence.⁸ In time, Staupitz, as Luther's superior in the order, designated him for further studies in theology, so that Luther would succeed him in the vacated teaching chair in Wittenberg. For Luther this meant further developing the familiarity with Scripture begun in the novitiate.

*Luther as Communicator of a
Spirituality, 1513–1517*

Friar Martin received his doctorate in theology from the University of Wittenberg in October 1512, and soon after took over the biblical chair in the theology faculty. The first course he gave interpreted the Psalms (1513–15). He continued on Romans (1515–16), Galatians (1516–17), and Hebrews (1517–18), before he offered a second course on the Psalms (1518–20).

Members of the guild of Luther scholars have devoted scores of studies to these early Wittenberg biblical lectures given by Luther. My own work on them, as a doctoral candidate in Münster in the 1960s, focused on the guidance that Luther regularly drew from the texts as instruction in spirituality. He did interpret the texts with an eye to showing how biblically-formed Christians should shape their lives of prayer before God and their struggle to move on under God's ever-present influence toward the salvation God offers. Luther, as a friar-professor, did communicate a spirituality during his early lectures—just as his order's ideals indicated that he should.⁹

In his lectures on the Psalms, Luther repeatedly took these prayers of David as written for the spiritual struggle into which we all are thrown. Jesus prayed the Psalms when opposition cropped up against his teaching and when his disciples learned so slowly from him. He prayed the Psalms intently during his passion. But the God of the Psalms is not distant, even though the pattern

of His influences may be hidden from easy analysis, even hidden beneath contrary experiences, as when Jesus on the cross felt forsaken by God and prayed Psalm 22. For us the hidden God is very close, for instance, in the paradoxical moment of grace that is the confession of my own sin, as by Psalm 51 or by the tax collector in the temple (Luke 18:13).

Luther taught, based on Psalms and Romans, a penitential spirituality of reversal under God's word, which one expresses in a word of self-accusation of sin. But the reversal, in a new self-evaluation, occurs so that we can face life's great task. This in fact is God's work in the believer, which Luther took from St. Paul to be the therapeutic application of his divine healing from endemic sinfulness. First you have to admit your need, as the early chapters of Romans insist.

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Luther interpreted the need as based on the baneful inheritance of the old Adam that your lifestyle has left deeply lodged in your heart.

But God does not call believers to struggle alone, on their own, and in solitude. God is near, ever near, to heal their malady. Luther can celebrate this work of God, as the psalmist and Paul record their outbreaks of joyful confidence and delight in serving God. These moments are not a person's own achievement but instead works

of God's healing gifts in human hearts that have become susceptible to the work of the divine therapist. In one place in his Romans course, Luther calls Jesus "our Samaritan" who has left us under treatment until he returns, and the treatment does have its moments of effectiveness.

Luther's early lectures present us with his personalized version of a spirituality akin to what Bishop Augustine preached to the Christians of Hippo, and so Luther was very much in the larger Augustinian tradition. True to the obligation of further communication, Luther's first published book of his own teaching, brought out in spring 1517, was a German translation of the seven penitential psalms, along with Luther's commentary offering to readers many themes he had developed in his early biblical lectures. One astute interpreter of Luther's development, Oswald Bayer, called this small book the "authentic compendium of Luther's theology" during the years of his emergence, 1513–1517.¹⁰ This is quite true, though at the same time such a publication was entirely in keeping with what was expected of an Augustinian friar, namely, the communication to others of a spirituality to deepen their Christian prayer and living.

Luther's teaching on the penitential life of a Christian, ever under God's healing work in one's heart, became the basis of momentous developments in 1517–1518, when Luther began contesting the high view of human abilities before God then being taught by some "scholastic" theologians of the day. Furthermore, the spirituality of ongoing purification, based in the Psalms and in Paul, also gave Luther a touchstone by which to evaluate the preachers of indulgences in 1517, whom he found to be undercutting a life animated by confident yet urgent

prayer for God's purifying influence.

For the present, it can be a great gain to know how the Augustinian order formed Luther as a person avid and

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zealous to live, pray, and teach from Scripture. His teaching, especially as it first emerged from his biblical courses, remains a treasure and, quite possibly, a source of spiritual guidance—in the penitential life under God's healing grace—for Christians of all confessions in our day. LF

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Notes

1. One recent example is Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), with ch. 3 on Luther's "Flight to the Monastery" and ch. 4 on "Years of Silence," pp. 43–78, which betray the author's neglect of any investigation into the specific spiritual ideals of the Augustinian order that Luther entered in 1505.

2. Use of the proper terminology of "friars" and "friary," regarding the Augustinians and their houses, is one of the many positive aspects of the most recent full-length study of Luther's mentor Staupitz by Franz Posset, *The Front-Runner of the Catholic Reformation: The Life and Works of Johann von Staupitz* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

3. This is the terminology of the always-reliable *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*,

3rd ed., eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131.

4. Many particulars on the Augustinians are given in the modern encyclopedia of religious orders, in the entry by B. Rano, "Agostiniani," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di perfezione*, vol. 1, eds. Gerrino Pelliccia & Giancarlo Rocca, 10 vols. (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1974–2003), 278–381. So far I have never seen this entry on Luther's order cited in recent works on his early life and development, but I look forward to reading *Luther und das Monastische Erbe*, eds. Christoph Bultmann et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

5. Citing from "Constitutiones osea pro reformatione Alemanniae," ed. Wolfgang Günter, in *Johann von Staupitz, Sämtliche Schriften*, eds. Lothar Graf von Dohna and Richard Wetzel, vol. 5, Gutachten und Satzungen, Spätmittelalter und Reformation 17 (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 194.

6. *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung bis 1519*, ed. Otto Scheel, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1929), nos. 190 (p. 73) and 394 (p. 145), giving Table Talk, nos. 116 and 3767, on reading a Bible in the university library. Then no. 253 (p. 99), giving Table Talk, no. 1745, on the university practice of understanding Scripture according to Aristotle.

7. *Ibid.*, nos. 190 (p. 73), 439 (p. 159), and 538 (p. 206), giving Table Talk, nos. 116, 5346, and M. Mathesius's account of Luther's early life, on his intense bible study as a novice. Also no. 422 (p. 154), giving Table Talk, no. 4691, on Luther becoming "ein guter textualis," who knew where to find biblical passages. Again, no. 190 (p. 73–74), at the end of Table Talk, no. 116, on Luther pondering a weighty passage all day.

8. *Ibid.*, nos. 439 (p. 159), 445 (p. 161), and 538 (p. 210), giving Table Talk, nos. 5346, 5373, and Mathesius, on Staupitz ordering Bible reading at table in the friaries.

9. I set this forth at length in *Man Yearning for Grace* (Washington: Corpus, 1968 and Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1969). A more compact account is in *Luther and His Spiritual Legacy* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983), ch. 4, "Luther's Theology of the Cross, 1513–18." More recently, "God and His Grace according to Luther, 1509–1517," in *Luther Bulletin* 10 (2001): 83–105, which was also published in compact form in *Luther Digest* 11 (2003): 131–34.

10. Oswald Bayer, *Promissio: Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 144.

ST. NENILAVA

James B. Vigen

The Lutheran Church in Madagascar (*Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy*, FLM) is among the fastest growing in the world. It is growing not only numerically but also in the spiritual depth of its witness to the gospel of Jesus the Christ. The FLM can also be lifted up as one in which a true indigenization of the Christian faith has taken place. All of these positive qualities are attributable not solely to, but to a large extent because of, the incredible life and work of a woman named Volahavana Germaine, better known to the world by the name by which her followers called her, Nenilava.

The impact that this woman has had upon the church in Madagascar is quite amazing, given the fact that the Lutheran church there has steadfastly refused to ordain women into the ministry of Word and Sacrament—yet nearly everyone within the church will proudly name her a prophet. Her rise to leadership of an indigenous-led revival movement with an international reach is almost inexplicable, humanly speaking, as she had practically no formal education of any sort. Another amazing thing about her influence is that the revival movement that she led for fifty-seven years, known as the *Fifohazana* or “awakening,” has never departed from the church whence it emerged.

Volahavana Germaine was born around 1918 in a little village close to the town of Manakara on Madagascar’s southeast coast.¹ As was the case with most Malagasy of that period, she was born at home and given the name Baolava. There is no official record of her birth, nor did anyone take any particular note of the day or even the exact year! She was the third of four girls in the family.

The child was not born into a Christian home. Indeed, her father, Malady, was a petty chieftain of the Antaimoro people group and also a practitioner of traditional medicine, making use of charms, reading the *sikidy* (“omens” or “portents”), telling people’s fortunes and perhaps even calling down curses upon someone’s enemy. Later in life, when telling about her youth, she indicated that she never approved of her father’s work and at a young age denounced it publicly. For a young woman to speak out against her own father was practically unheard of in those

days! Sometime after this, Malady had a vision in which he saw his daughter as a high priestess, and so he ceased to engage in those traditional practices.

Many well-to-do men sought to marry Volahavana Germaine, speaking to her father about the matter. In Malagasy tradition, marriages are always arranged between families rather than being decisions made on an individual or romantic basis. Again, breaking strongly with tradition, Volahavana Germaine refused even to consider any of the men who spoke to her father.

Finally, after being pressured by her parents, she agreed to marry an aged Lutheran catechist named Mosesy Tsirefo in 1935. Mosesy was a widower with several children from his first marriage. However, prior to marrying a catechist, Volahavana Germaine was required to become a Christian. She was instructed in the faith by the local pastor, Ramasivelo, and when her studies were complete just two weeks later, he baptized her. It was at the time of her baptism that young Baolava took on her new name and identity as Volahavana Germaine. Only afterwards did her marriage to Mosesy Tsirefo take place. The marriage lasted ten years, until Mosesy died in 1945.

Volahavana Germaine’s spiritual awakening and call to ministry took place four years prior to Mosesy’s death. One of his daughters got sick and was thought to be possessed by evil spirits. A local catechist named Petera de Vohidrafy was trying to cast the demon out of the girl but to no avail. Volahavana Germaine was in another room cooking when she heard a voice commanding her to go and do something for the poor suffering girl. Volahavana Germaine hesitated to move, but an invisible force pushed her into the other room, right in front of the child writhing on the floor and insensate. Volahavana Germaine took hold of the child, embraced her, and would not let her go. At length, the spirits possessing the child declared “we are going to leave because the one who is stronger than we are is coming.”

That was on August 1, 1941. The same night Jesus was said to appear to the three people present at the healing: Volahavana Germaine, Mosesy Tsirefo, and Petera de Vohidrafy. Jesus commanded them to “get up, preach the good news to the whole world. Chase the demons out.

Commit yourselves and do not delay. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified in the Maritanana and Ambohibe tribes. I have chosen you for this mission. I command you to carry it out.”²

Both catechists immediately assented to the Lord’s command. Volahavana Germaine, however, did not. She protested that she was too young, too uneducated—she could not read or write, having never attended school—and that she did not know the Scriptures, so how could she possibly preach? But Jesus continued to appear insistently to Volahavana Germaine. She relented when Jesus promised that he himself would give her instruction and the words to speak. For the rest of her life, Volahavana Germaine never spoke in her own name. She always said it was Jesus’ word she was sharing.

Volahavana Germaine’s Spirit-filled ministry thus began when she was only twenty-one years old, in her home region among the Antemoro people of the Manakara region. These people are among

the strictest taboo-based ethnic group in Madagascar. It follows a male dominated culture; it is [the] man who is the head of a group, a family, a village. He holds a power which makes him accepted and respected... women are seen as the thread following the needle... It is amazing to know that in a male dominated culture such as the Antemoro culture, our Lord Jesus Christ elected and called a woman such as Nenilava to be an influential leader.³

The nickname “Nenilava” was first given to Volahavana Germaine by people of her region, who mocked her for presuming to take a leadership role as a woman. The name means “tall mother,” and she was certainly tall for a woman, standing slightly over six feet tall. She accepted the name, though, because she saw it as a symbol of her persecution as a follower of Jesus Christ. Her spiritual children or



Nenilava

followers in the revival movement usually refer to her as *Neni* or “mother.”⁴

The early phase of Nenilava’s ministry, roughly from 1941 to 1953, was marked by a certain amount of conflict between her movement and Lutheran church authorities, missionaries, and their home agencies. Some critics were opposed to her because of her lack of formal education. Perhaps they feared what had occurred already in other African countries: revival movements splitting people off into African Indigenous Churches and away from the foundations laid over many years by the missions. Others were suspicious of the focus on demon possession and exorcism. Such critics heard and repeated stories of a person with a fatal disease being misdiagnosed as possessed. But gradually she won over most of her critics, indigenous Malagasy church leaders and missionaries serving alongside them.

Nenilava and her co-workers followed the model of earlier revival movements in Madagascar, especially that of the *mpianatry ny tompo* (“Disciples of the Lord”) who had established a *toby* at Soatanana in the Fianarantsoa region of the Central Highlands. A *toby* (pronounced too-bee) is a dedicated spiritual center or camp analogous to the monasteries of the early monastic movement in Europe.

Followers in the revival were and are consecrated as *mpiandry* (“shepherds”) after a two-year period of training under the supervision of a local pastor and approval by a local committee of elders in the movement. All *mpiandry* candidates are trained by the pastor in their own area. The rules of the revival state that no preaching, teaching, or healing can be done without the presence of the local pastor. In this way the revival has been kept closely aligned with the FLM, though a good number of people from other denominational backgrounds have become *mpiandry*, including Roman Catholics.

When doing their “work”⁵ the *mpiandry* wear special robes identical to the white Geneva preaching gowns worn by pastors of the FLM, but without the stole. Female *mpiandry* always wear headgear similar to what Roman Catholic nuns used to wear. A *toby* will have a certain number of *mpiandry* living within its confines who minister to all who come there for healing, both physical and spiritual. Other *mpiandry* live and work outside the *toby* but travel there to do their work. No one who comes to a *toby* is ever charged for their food or for any other care given to them. The *toby* are largely self-sustaining, receiving no financial assistance from either the indigenous church or from mission agencies but only donations.

Nenilava and her followers established a *toby* near her native village in Ankaramalaza, which is located about fifty kilometers from Manakara. The village is only accessible by taking a canoe ride across a wide, crocodile-infested river.

It didn’t take long for Nenilava’s fame to grow. She spent thirty years in a ministry of itinerant evangelism, traveling all over Madagascar. Everywhere Nenilava went she took with her a letter of introduction from the pastor of the Ankaramalaza *toby*, which served as her introduction to church authorities in the villages, towns, and cities she visited. In just about every place she visited a *toby* was formed.

There are today fifty-six such centers around the large island nation, with the toby of Ankaramalaza serving as headquarters for the movement. Each year new mpiandry are consecrated at Ankaramalaza, usually numbering in the hundreds, sometimes over a thousand.

Nenilava's work centered on three things: proclaiming the gospel, casting out demons, and laying on hands for healing, within the toby and without. To emphasize that the revival movement was not to be thought of as an independent church, originally the ministry of the mpiandry did not take place during the Sunday morning liturgical service. Instead, special services were announced for the afternoon or evening, and anyone who wanted to could come seek the ministrations of the mpiandry.⁶ At any high church festival, such as an ordination or church anniversary, the mpiandry

are all invited to vest, process, and be seated in places of honor together with the ordained pastors. I believe that the mpiandry actually function as a fully recognized form of the diaconate within the FLM.

Despite significant scholarly documentation of the Fifohazana, the story of how Nenilava influenced health care in Madagascar has not often been told.

In the late 1970s Stan Quanbeck, a doctor, and his wife Kathie Quanbeck, a nurse, resigned from their work in southwest Madagascar because of the frustration of trying to run Ejeda Hospital while under the constant and petty interference of the local FLM synod president. Stan was a third-generation missionary to Madagascar and had gone to medical school with the sole intention of serving as a medical missionary.

On their way out of the country, the Quanbecks stopped in the capital city of Antananarivo to pay their respects to the church leadership and say their goodbyes. Little did they know that Nenilava had been working behind the scenes to have the tobys designated as health clinics of the church! The national church leadership of the FLM asked the Quanbecks to become leaders of a new, centralized health department of the church with headquarters in the capital.

After praying over the matter for some time, Stan and Kathie decided to "try it for two years." They ended up staying for twenty-five years and building up the health ministry, which now serves the whole country and does work in almost all the larger tobys, some of them having grown into full-fledged health clinics. Almost all of the physicians and most of the nurses and other medical personnel

Ankaramalaza toby





Malagasy revival meeting

working in the Lutheran Department of Health (SALFA) are consecrated mpiandry themselves.

One key intervention of the Quanbecks was to arrange for special training for the SALFA personnel to help them identify psychotic issues with a medical basis. The staff also learned to prescribe drugs necessary to calm down highly emotional or possibly psychotic persons long enough for the spiritual ministrations of the mpiandry to be carried out with some hope of success. Having trained medical personnel working hand in hand with the tobys also tempered the criticism that health problems were worsened by a diagnosis of demon oppression when the real problem was a medical condition—or, as most Malagasy mpiandry would suggest, both!

In another case of symbiosis between toby ministry and health care, a young medical student named Mamy Jocelyn Ranaivoson was attracted to the movement and volunteered with other medical students to work in the toby at “67 Hectares,” a poor neighborhood of Antananarivo. He and the others treated the sick who lined up each day at the toby for basic care. On the first occasion that Mamy was introduced to Nenilava, she greeted him as “Doctor.” He pro-

tested that he was still only a first-year medical student. Nenilava said to him, “You are already a doctor for me.” She later urged him to get consecrated as a mpiandry, which he did. Nenilava also informed him during Holy Week 1986 that he was going to America.

Mamy did his internship in Fianarantsoa at one of the new clinics opened by SALFA serving the poor in the city as well as theological students and faculty at the FLM’s national seminary. While still in Fianarantsoa, Mamy applied to and was accepted at the School of Tropical Medicine in Belgium but lacked the funds to attend. He asked Stan Quanbeck whether there might be a scholarship, but there was none. But Quanbeck had another proposal: “How would you like to serve in Papua New Guinea?” Mamy had to be shown on a map where exactly that was—not, as he first assumed, somewhere in Africa!

Mamy served for several years in Papua New Guinea through an ELCA program called South-South Exchange, which provides the salary and logistical support for one southern hemisphere country to serve the needs of another. Mamy and his wife Honore had a great impact both through his medical work as well as through the mpiandry ministry that

came with him. After several years as a South-South missionary, Mamy asked permission to train in the United States not as a doctor of tropical medicine but to become a pastor! Today he serves as the pastor of Journey Lutheran Church in Onalaska, Wisconsin. Nenilava’s prophecy about him came true! Nenilava also prophesied that one of Mamy and Honore’s daughters would become a pastor. This, too, came to pass.⁷

Nenilava herself traveled and witnessed internationally. In 1973, at the invitation of several American churches and the Norwegian Missionary Society, she visited both countries and even received an audience with the king of Norway. She again traveled abroad in 1980, this time to the small village of Pours Saint Rémy in the Ardennes forest near the Belgian border. She and two female co-workers stayed there for three months. The many Malagasy living in France who knew about her work wanted her to come and minister to them and give them guidance about forming a toby of their own. These plans, first prayed about and planned in 1980, came to fruition in 1997 when the toby of Pours Saint Rémy was inaugurated.⁸

Another example of Nenilava’s

international influence upon the church is one of her early followers, Péri Rasolondraibe, who earned a doctorate in systematic theology from Princeton Theological Seminary. He taught for a period at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then became Director of the Lutheran World Federation's Department for Mission and Development, serving from 1995 to 2005.

During the years 1973 through 1980 Nenilava had to limit her travels due to health concerns of her own. She lived mainly at the new toby in the capital in 67 Hectares and at the Ambohibao toby, which opened in 1987 and houses a large medical clinic. She returned each year, though, to Ankaramalaza for the annual convention of the Fifohazana, which always meets from July 27 to August 2 to commemorate the beginning of Nenilava's ministry. There is also a toby named for her, Toby Nenilava in Fort Dauphin, which opened in 1980. And there are tobys of various sizes in just about every major city and town of Madagascar.

With her itinerancy restricted, Nenilava took on a new role: as matchmaker. Not only did the Malagasy bride and groom traditionally not choose for themselves, but marriages were never arranged between different people groups or between couples considered to be unequal in social status. For example, a woman from a family of *andriana*, or nobles, would never be paired with someone not from a noble family. Likewise, a young man with slave ancestry would never be able to marry a woman whose lineage had never been in a state of servitude.

In the Fifohazana movement, however, many young mpiandry went to Nenilava and precisely *not* to their biological parents to ask for a spouse. Nenilava was said to ask Jesus directly for the proper prospective spouse. Nenilava invariably arranged marriages between persons of different ethnicities, social ranks, and educational levels. For example, Andreas

Richard, a mpiandry who worked for the Malagasy equivalent of the Social Security administration and later became the treasurer of the FLM, went to Nenilava for a wife. He initially refused her suggestion because the woman didn't have a job, while he was a fairly high-ranking government official. Not only that, they'd never even met! A year later, though, he consented to the marriage, trusting that Nenilava's choice came from God. He admitted that, of course, there are problems in every marriage, even those arranged and blessed by Nenilava, but that his marriage had been abundantly blessed.⁹

Another example of Nenilava's matchmaking is Modeste Rakoto Endor, the immediate past president of the FLM. His wife Jeannette was one of Nenilava's spiritual children. Modeste Rakoto Endor's family was quite prominent in Fort Dauphin, whereas Jeannette was an orphan who, like Nenilava herself, had almost no formal education. The two spouses are also from very different ethnic groups. Prior to becoming the president of the FLM, Modeste Rakoto Endor received a doctorate from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in New Testament and was a professor at the FLM seminary in Fianarantsoa. Jeannette only learned to read while singing in church, when she began to make connections between the words she was singing and what she saw written in the hymnal. While resident in Chicago she became fluent in English and took a leadership role among the graduate student spouses' group at LSTC.

Despite her many accomplishments and successes, Nenilava's work was not always free of controversy, even long after the initial years of skepticism. Two cases stand out, one relatively minor and the other more problematic.

The less controversial case took place when Nenilava traveled to Norway. She visited a Norwegian state church congregation in the town of Harstad. Nenilava believed that Jesus

told her while she was there that this was exactly the type of church that should be built at Ankaramalaza. At that time, almost all the buildings at Ankaramalaza were built with local materials found on the coast: sticks, bamboo, and banana fronds for the roof. The church in Harstad, however, was of stone, steel, and concrete. Besides being located on a faraway island, Ankaramalaza was far from any main roads for materials transport—to say nothing of the cost involved. Nenilava asked the Norwegian Missionary Society to assist in the building of this chapel. They refused until the project was drastically altered not to be an exact copy of the church in Norway. The church, however, was built!¹⁰ During the last several years, many prominent mpiandry with the means to do so have built modern, Western-style homes for their use during the annual gathering in Ankaramalaza. The wealth issues involved are glaring in a society that suffers from such extreme poverty.

The second issue is far more serious. In 1983 it became known that the leaders of the movement had decided that, in fulfillment of a divine command Nenilava had received from Jesus, she would be invested as "Chief Prophetess," wearing a robe and crown following the exact description of high priest Aaron's vestments in Exodus 28 and 29. Many objected to this idea, especially within the missionary community and, indeed, though many expatriate mission personnel were very favorably disposed toward the movement—and some even consecrated as mpiandry—no missionaries took part in the event.¹¹ Lotera Fabien, a pastor and the director of the seminary in Fianarantsoa, has insisted that this event did not consecrate Nenilava as a high priest but simply recognized her role as a prophet.¹² Despite the controversy, even after the consecration there was no change in Nenilava's actions nor in the movement itself. The matter slowly faded from memory. Her gown and crown were, for a time, able to be

viewed in a small historical display in Ankaramalaza but at the present time they are kept in a secure location and only displayed on special occasions.¹³

While these were the only two disputes between the Fifohazana and the national church or missionaries, there has been a good deal of controversy on the ecumenical front. The largest Protestant church on the island, a union church known as the FJKM,¹⁴ has complained bitterly because entire congregations of theirs have officially petitioned to become congregations of the FLM instead! The stated reason is always that the people of those congregations have been deeply influenced by the Fifohazana and they felt that the Lutheran church was supportive of their spiritual awakening while the FJKM was not.

Despite these matters, the overwhelming body of evidence is that Nenilava's influence upon the people of Madagascar and many oth-

ers around the world is nothing short of astounding. While no statistics have been kept, anecdotal evidence suggests that probably well over 90% of all the pastors and other leaders of the FLM are mpiandry or have otherwise been greatly influenced by the movement. If you travel to Madagascar and inquire about Nenilava's influence, you will hear story after story of her healings, prophecies foretold and fulfilled, lives changed in the most dramatic ways after meeting with her. And yet, by every account, Nenilava's basic character as a very modest and soft-spoken woman never changed. Nobody who ever came to her for a blessing or advice got turned away. They may have had to wait for hours behind those who'd gotten there first, but she turned no one away.

For the last decade or more of her life Nenilava was mostly homebound in her quarters at Toby Ambohibao. Visitors still came to see her and seek blessings from her, but she seldom

ventured out. She died at Ambohibao in 1998. Her body was transported to Ankaramalaza, where she was buried. No "successor" has emerged in her ministry. The Fifohazana movement that she led for so many years is directed now by a committee of elders chosen from within. The FLM some years ago created an official Department of Revivals!

In the meanwhile, there has been no evident lessening of Nenilava's influence or of the movement she co-founded so many years ago. She was not only a "tall mother"; she was a woman who stood tall in the faith given her at baptism, and she reached heights of both spiritual and human influence attained by few others in the history of the church. *LF*

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Consecration of shepherds at Ankaramalaza



Nenilava among friends

Notes

1. While the exact date is not certain, some scholars put the year at 1920. See Berthe Raminoasa Rasoanalimanga, “Rainisoalambo, Ravelonjanahary and Volahavana Germaine (Nenilava): Revival Leaders of Madagascar,” *Journal of African Christian Biography* 1/7 (2016). The date engraved on Volahavana Germaine’s grave is July 14, 1920. However, many earlier works place her birth sometime in 1918.
2. Zakaria Tsiwoery, “Ny Tantaran’ny Fifohazana Ankaramalaza,” in *Ny Tantaran’ny Fifohazana Eto Madagasikara Soatanana, Farihimena, Ankaramalaza* (Antananarivo: Trano Printy Loterana, 2001), 190. The English translation used here is from Rasoanalimanga, “Rainisoalambo Ravelonjanahary, and Volavana Germaine (Nenilava),” 17.

3. Lotera Fabien, “The Healing Ministry of Ankaramalaza,” *Africa Theological Journal* 35/1 (2015): 5–6.
4. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
5. I have placed the word “work” in quotation marks not to question its legitimacy but to indicate that this is a literal translation of what the mpiandry themselves call what they do, their *asa*. It consists equally of preaching, healing, and giving spiritual guidance or pastoral care (*dinidinika* in Malagasy). Nenilava herself always emphasized the priority of preaching above all else.
6. At a meeting of the Church Council of Madagascar some years ago, the Komity Maharatra amin’ny Synoda Lehibe decided that these healing ministries could take place also within the Sunday morning liturgy of the

church. Personal correspondence with Lotera Fabien, January 2017.

7. Personal correspondence with Mamy Jocelyn Ranaivoson, January 2017.

8. *The Fifohazana: Madagascar’s Indigenous Christian Movement*, ed. Cynthia Holder Rich (Amherst: Cambria, 2008), 34.

9. Edgar R. Trexler, “The Prophetess of Madagascar: Selecting mates, sending shepherds and exorcists—all in a day’s work for Neni-lava,” *The Lutheran* (September 27, 1999): 13. This article was written at the time of the one hundredth anniversary of American Lutheran missionary work in Madagascar. The ELCA’s first presiding bishop, Herbert Chilstrom, and the editor of *The Lutheran*, Edgar R. Trexler, attended the festivities. Chilstrom met with Neni-lava during that visit and toured a toby.

10. Kjetil Aano, “The Missions and the Fifohazana: Cultural Clashes and the Question of Power,” in *The Fifohazana*, 68.

11. *Ibid.*, 64.

12. Lotera Fabien, “Healing Ministry,” 3, and personal correspondence.

13. Personal correspondence with Andrianasolo Jaona, General Secretary of the Ankaramalaza Revival Movement, January 2017.

14. The *Fiangonan’i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara* (FJKM) is often described as a church in the Reformed family. While this may be how it self-identifies today, the denomination was originally formed as a union of congregations established by many different mission societies, including the Society of Friends, the congregations formed out of the London Missionary Society, which was congregational in polity, and congregations formed by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Association.

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LARS LEVI LAESTADIUS
AND THE NORDIC REVIVAL*Hannu Juntunen*

Laestadianism, a conservative revival movement that began in the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia in the nineteenth century, is still an active force in contemporary Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Its core area is the Nordic region, with about 300,000 adherents (the exact figure is uncertain) divided into a number of distinct groups.¹ In Finland, Laestadianism is the largest revivalist movement when measured by the number of its supporters. Laestadianism has increasingly become an international spiritual movement, and it may be the largest religious movement to have emerged from the Nordic countries.

Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), the founder of the revival movement bearing his name, was a pastor of the Lutheran state Church of Sweden. Laestadius served as a vicar in Sweden’s northernmost parish, Karesuando (1826–1849), and subsequently in Pajala (1849–1861); both villages are close to the Finnish border.²

Early Life and Education

Laestadius was of both Swedish and Sami³ origins, and grew up in a Sami area. His family name comes from the little village of Lästad in northern Sweden. Some of his ancestors and relatives were clergymen, but his father Karl was a hunter and fisherman in Arjeplog in Swedish Lapland. The family lived on the edge of poverty because of Karl’s alcoholism. Lars and his brother Petrus were able to attend school because of financial assistance from an older half-brother, Karl Erik Laestadius, who was a Lutheran pastor at Kvikkjokk in northern Sweden. Laestadius married Brita Catharina (Kajsa) Alstadius (1805–1888) in 1827. They had twelve children. The death of their son Levi, who died at the age of four in 1840, was a great tragedy for them.

Laestadius studied botany as well as theology at Uppsala University. A gifted student, he began his ministerial studies immediately after matriculating in 1820. He was ordained in Härnösand in 1825 together with his brother Petrus. After completing the examination required for ecclesiastical promotion, Laestadius was made the dean of the chapter of the Härnösand diocese in 1843. Laestadius’s

successor as the vicar of Pajala parish was his son-in-law, Per Lorens Norborg. Laestadius pioneered the alphabetization of the Lule Sami language⁴ and published a book of Bible stories in it. He also studied Finnish, which he did not know when he came to Karesuando, but upon which he was almost entirely dependent during his later years.

Laestadius also became a respected scientist—a botanist and expert on the flora of Lapland.⁵ In 1838–1839 he was invited to join a scientific expedition to Greenland and other Arctic areas financed by the French Admiralty and led by the French naturalist Joseph Paul Gaimard (1793–1858). Laestadius joined the expedition as a specialist in mountain flora. He was able to sell several thousand specimens of mountain plants to Gaimard. He also wrote *Histoire et mythologie des Lapons* at Gaimard’s request. This book was never actually published in French, but the Swedish version appeared in 1959.

Laestadius’s Theology

Laestadius’s most important work was a theological dissertation entitled *Dårhushjonet* (“The Madhouse Inmate”), which was not published in his lifetime. The book is a hybrid of religion and philosophy— theology combined with theories of psychology that were regarded as empirically founded in the 1830s. The text should be understood as Laestadius’s way of opposing the dominant philosophical paradigms of mid-nineteenth-century theology. The work was not published until in the middle of the twentieth century but has attracted increasing attention since then.

Laestadius wrote almost all his sermons in Finnish, and they have been reprinted in collected form many times. It is also possible to check the published versions of the sermons against the original manuscripts; one can now use all 466 of Laestadius’s extant sermons as source material.

The core of Laestadius’s theology is an anthropological argument in which he sought to prove through empirical observation that human behaviors are governed by the human heart. After Adam’s fall, the human heart became wicked and could not be purified by human will. Therefore, divine redemption must be realized in the believer’s heart

through the stages of the *ordo salutis*. Laestadius's basic theological concept of justification combined the forensic imputative with the ontic view of the doctrine. He used the anthropological argument to claim that a subjective sense of redemption in the believer's heart is necessary for justification. In his thought, the forensic and ontic aspects of justification are not in opposition.

Laestadius regarded pietism as the correct interpretation of Lutheran teachings; accordingly, he held that pure Lutheran doctrine had been supplanted in the thinking and preaching of the Swedish church. To be the true church, the Church of Sweden must teach true Lutheran doctrine, guide people to subjective experiences of faith, and promote revival within the church. The historic church exists to awaken living faith.

*Laestadius as Pietist
Theologian and Revivalist*

Laestadius's understanding of the phenomenon of "living Christianity"—the reason for the church's existence—was manifested in pietistic revivals, including his own revival movement but not only in his.

Laestadius emphasized repentance above all else. In his thought, the sacrament of baptism does not occupy the same fundamental position as it does in traditional Lutheran orthodoxy. It is instead referred to as a *covenant*, and its sacramental character has been weakened. In order to lead his communicants to proper penitence and repentance, Laestadius used the conceptual framework of a covenant of baptism broken by sin. Laestadius's preaching of repentance is situated within the pietistic tradition. Further indications of his belonging to this tradition are his intense interest in the order of grace, the various spiritual conditions of believers, and the direction of his religious teaching.

Laestadius's preaching of Christ's atoning death is not guided by the forensic metaphor of Lutheran orthodoxy. He is instead concerned to bring his listeners to look upon the suffering Savior and thus be brought to penitence, repentance, and the new birth. His emphasis on the new birth is an extension of the stress he places on the spiritual power that characterizes true Christians.

When Laestadius began his work as a revivalist, he was apparently aware that he was offering an alternative to the traditional methods of evangelism used in his church. This is particularly true of the new kind of confession practiced in Laestadian groups—a variant originated and introduced by Laestadius himself. The pietistic emphasis, which had previously been only latent, took concrete form in the Laestadian movement: the order of grace was embodied in their groups.

Laestadius expected the fruits of preaching to take the form of what he called "conviction and repentance." These terms were understood in a concrete fashion as the work of



Sketch of Laestadius made for the report of 1838–1840 expedition of the French-led Commission Scientifique du Nord, for which he was chosen due to his knowledge of both botany and Sami culture.

the Spirit through the preacher. Real contrition, real weeping, and real lamentation were demanded; a revival sermon must have visible effects. Laestadius's concept of repentance was often connected to outward manifestations that one might achieve despite one's limited ethical freedom. It may therefore be called outward repentance and consists first and foremost in a proper confession—a detailed recital of sins made before the assembled congregation. Further, penitents must be reconciled with those nearest to them and must renounce all willful sins.

Laestadius thought that genuine Christians have the right to examine others with respect to their spiritual state and to impel them in this way to the requisite confession of their sins. His teaching seems to have been that grace is given only to those who are able to receive it. He emphasizes that true spiritual judgment must take place—a judgment to be carried out by one's fellow Christians. These Christians are believers sufficiently experienced in the order of grace to know when a person is in the proper spiritual state to receive grace.

Laestadius's preaching and practice left room for assurance of grace in connection with the work of the spiritual priesthood in the congregation. Laestadius claimed that the power to forgive sins really has been placed in human hands; in his own church it is the true Christians who

exercise this power. The Spirit works directly in the heart of the repentant sinner, who may receive a “sign of grace” through a vision, an audible message, or a virtually indefinable feeling of being in the “joyful state” of grace.

Beginning and Growth of the Laestadian Movement

The parish of Karesuando was a Sami congregation; as such, it had a number of distinctive characteristics. A particularly noteworthy feature was the observation of general days of prayer, which had to be concentrated during the winter months when the nomadic Lapps were temporarily settled in the vicinity. The custom of “village prayers” led by laypeople was also the rule in the parishes along the Swedish-Finnish border. The literature used on these occasions included collections of sermons and other forms of devotional literature.

Laestadius was associated with these pietist movements and literary productions. In January 1844 Laestadius met a Sami woman named Milla Clementsdotter (1813–?), also known as Lapp Mary or Maria of Lapland. Laestadius had been con-

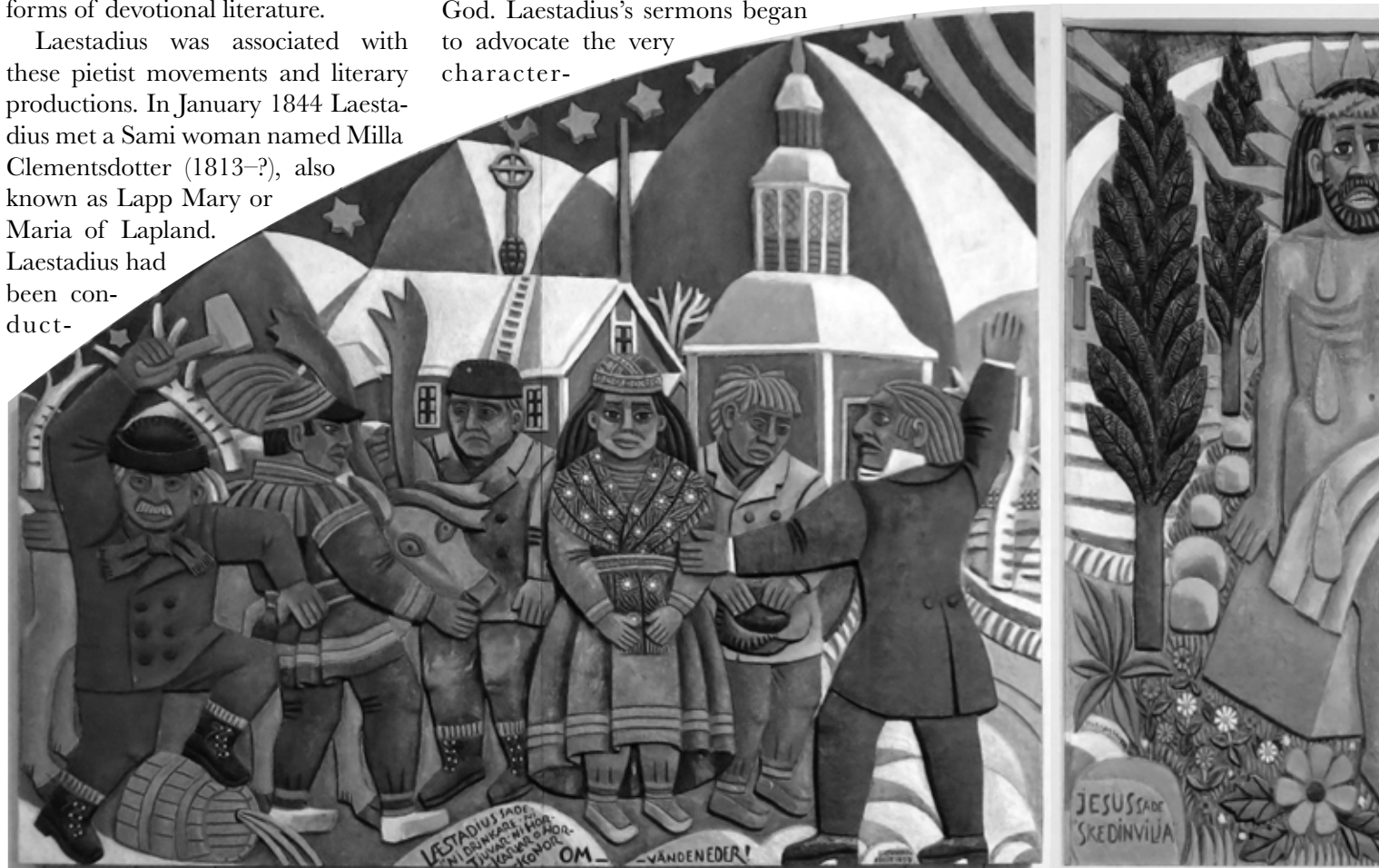
duct- ing a visitation of the Åsele parish in Swedish Lapland, and Milla, who belonged to a group known as the “Readers,” asked to talk with him after the service about her conversion experiences and her faith journey.

Researchers who have studied Laestadius have interpreted the significance of this encounter with Milla/Maria for Laestadius and his spirituality in various ways. He had by this time lost his father, two of his children, and the half-brother who had helped to provide an education for him and his brother Petrus. Laestadius’s grief may have made him more than ordinarily receptive to a spiritual awakening of his own. In any case one can say that Milla led Laestadius to his personal revival. She does not seem to have influenced Laestadius’s formal theology, and his sermons did not change in a radical fashion, but she did become a role model for him of a deep experiential relationship with God. Laestadius’s sermons began to advocate the very character-

istics of the pietist movements of the early 1840s. From a historian’s perspective, the essential origin of the Laestadian revival is to be found in this new emphasis.

The revival emerged in the Karesuando parish by the end of 1845. It was not only a religious rebirth but also brought a social resurrection to an area that had been devastated by alcoholism. Laestadius’s emphasis on the evils of drinking, which was in part derived from his childhood experience of an alcoholic father, was a recurrent theme in his sermons. A passage from an 1857 sermon on Psalm 115 is typical:

The drunkard’s favorite god is the visible flowing liquor, rum, or whatever his name may be, which we call the devil’s shit, for the devil teaches people to ruin God’s grain and to make it harmful to body and soul. The people



who drink it become animals. And what is the favorite god of the liquor merchant? Why, nothing other than that round liquor barrel, on which the liquor devil sits astride, as the heathen have painted him in their pictures.⁶

Laestadius himself as well as his lay assistants held village prayers in Kareuando and its environs. The lay preachers had many manuscripts and copies of Laestadius's own sermons to draw upon as their teaching materials. Copies of Laestadius's sermons were frequently used in the revival movement for years after his death.

Laestadius had many conflicts with ecclesiastical and social authorities in the early years of the revival. He was accused, for instance, of spiritual ecstasism and stirring up the emotions of the people. The charges were partially unfounded. Laestadius answered his critics in published articles as well as during episcopal visitations. In any case, he was allowed

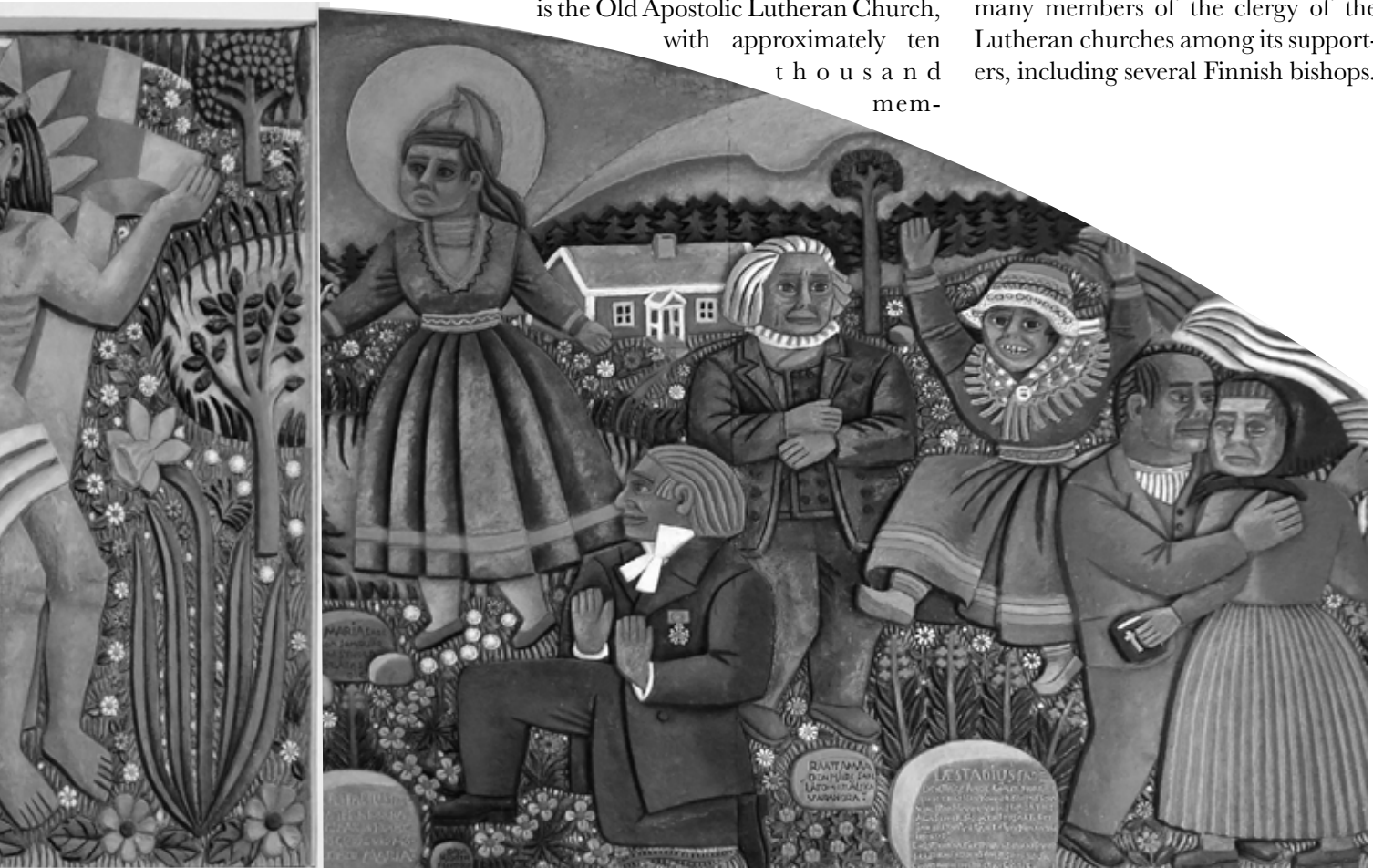
to continue as the vicar in Pajala, although his bishop asked him in 1853 to hold two separate worship services each Sunday, one for the Laestadians and the other for the more conventional communicants.

The movement spread widely in Laestadius's own lifetime in the northern parts of Sweden, Finland, and Norway, where it is still a major religious and cultural factor. After Laestadius's death, the leadership of the movement was assigned to lay preachers, the most remarkable of whom was the catechist Juhani (or Johan) Raattamaa (1811–1899). The greatest expansion of Laestadianism began in the 1860s, and it spread rapidly as far as southern Finland and even into St. Petersburg in what is now the Russian Federation.

During the following decades the movement spread practically everywhere that Finnish was spoken. Emigration brought the revival to North America, where believers founded their own bodies, the largest of which is the Old Apostolic Lutheran Church, with approximately ten thousand mem-

bers today.⁷ Laestadian enclaves can be found in Canada and other countries as well. At the turn of the twentieth century, the European movement split into three main factions: the Conservative, the Reawakening, and the Firstborn. Further splintering occurred during the course of the twentieth century. Today seven major Laestadian groups may be identified.

The Laestadian community soon became rather exclusive in its character. The distinction between "Christians" (that is, Laestadians) and outsiders was made clear. Although the movement spread over a wide expanse of northern Scandinavia, its internal unity remained very strong. Its cohesiveness did not, however, lead to separation from the state churches. The sacraments were still received in accordance with Lutheran ecclesiastical order. For example, Laestadius always used wine when celebrating the eucharist even though he was otherwise a teetotaler. From the 1870s onward Laestadianism has had many members of the clergy of the Lutheran churches among its supporters, including several Finnish bishops.





“Pastor Laestadius Preaching to the Sami,” by Francois Auguste Biard (1840).

Characteristics of Laestadianism

The main characteristics of Laestadianism were from the beginning rigorous repentance sermons, oral confession of sins and absolution, and the so-called *liikutukset* (the Finnish word for emotional outbursts of a religious nature). Laestadius called these *liikutukset* “marks of grace” but not as preconditions for grace. *Liikutukset* are semicstatic phenomena, and they were typical of Laestadian revivals until very recently. Usually these *liikutukset* appear in Laestadian prayer meetings when some people may shout such expressions as “Lord Jesus, be praised!” But such charismatic phenomena as healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues, or other dramatic experiences of the Holy Spirit are not characteristic of the Laestadian movement.

The Laestadian exhortation to faith has been regarded by scholars as being an unconditional and personally conveyed absolution, and it has been

claimed that this kind of absolution is characteristic of Laestadianism. But it can hardly be called unconditional when we have such express conditions for absolution and “grace promised,” as is in fact the case here. This is not an unconditional absolution in the sense of Lutheran orthodoxy. The pattern is instead to be found in the pietist tradition, in which believers are assured of the grace of God on the basis of certain external signs.

The fact that this movement was able to continue as a movement must be ascribed to Laestadius’s willpower and his ability to organize the movement within the congregations of the Nordic state churches. Laestadianism did not proceed on a basis of spiritual separatism. The *ecclesiola* he wished to build was well aware of its existence within the larger *ecclesia*. This tradition seems to have been built into the movement, and it is also characteristic of Laestadius’s immediate followers’ view of the revival. Laestadius’s emphasis on true Christians as

“spiritual priests” seems to have long been a guiding principle in the movement’s groups of believers. LF

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Notes

1. There are still a number of distinct groups of Laestadians as of 2015, with three groups active in North America: the Laestadian Lutheran Church, with thirty-two congregations in the U.S. and Canada (www.llchurch.org); the Old Apostolic Lutheran Church; and the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, which has six thousand communicant members (www.apostoliclutheran.org).

2. Karesuando (present population about 350) is separated only by a small river, which serves as the boundary between Sweden and Finland, from the Finnish village of Karesuvanto (population 140). According to local tradition they are considered one and the same village.

3. The Sami people are an indigenous Finno-Ugric people living in the Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. They are usually referred to in English as Lapps or Laplanders.

4. Sami is a Uralic language most closely related to Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian. It is written in the Latin alphabet and has about two thousand native speakers as of 2015.

5. There are several plant species named for Laestadius, including *Salix laestadiana*, *Carex laestadii*, and *Papaver laestadianum*. According to the International Plant Names Index (IPNI), Laestadius identified and named sixty-four other species of Arctic plants.

6. “A Sermon of Laestadius Given on the Fourth Day of Rogation in 1857,” translated into English and cited online at *Sami Culture*, <www.utexas.edu/courses/sami/diehtu/siida/christian/laest.htm> (accessed October 15, 2015).

7. The Old Apostolic Lutheran Church is the American branch of the Firstborn Laestadians. It is strongest in the upper Midwest, Alaska, and the Pacific Northwest, with thirty-eight preachers as of 2015. Unlike other branches of Laestadianism, the preachers of the OALC are laymen without theological training. They are not paid by their congregations and are not formally ordained.

MENNONITES AND LUTHERANS RE-REMEMBERING THE PAST

John D. Roth



In the fall of 1538, bystanders in the Dutch town of Rotterdam overheard a young widow singing an Anabaptist hymn. City officials immediately arrested her on the charges of sedition and heresy and in short order sentenced her to death. Her crime? The fact that she had been baptized as an adult. On January 24, 1539, Anneken Jans was executed by public drowning.

Anneken's story is only one of nearly a thousand similar narratives still remembered among Mennonites today thanks in large part to a massive book called *The Martyrs Mirror*. First published in the Netherlands in 1660, *The Martyrs Mirror* traces the doctrine of believers' baptism back to the time of the early church and recounts a long list of martyrs, beginning with Christ himself, who died for their convictions. In the 1685 edition of the volume, the Dutch engraver Jan Luycken gave added poignancy to Anneken's story with an etching that captured a particularly painful and dramatic moment in the account. Just before Anneken was led away to her execution, we see her holding out her infant son, along with a purse of money, to anyone in the crowd who will promise to care for the boy. Like many of the other martyr accounts, her story is also etched in living memory through the words of several letters that she wrote immediately prior to her death. On the evening before her execution, Anneken penned the following admonition to her only child:

My son, hear the instructions of your mother; open your ears to hear the words of my mouth... Do not regard the great number, my child, nor walk in their ways... but where you hear of a poor, simple, cast-off little flock, which is despised and rejected by the world, join them; for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ; from there do not depart.¹

Mennonites have not generally anchored their ecclesial unity in institutional structures, propositional doctrines, or confessional statements, but are much more inclined to frame their understanding of faith in the medium of stories.

For Lutheran readers, it may seem odd to begin an account of Mennonite-Lutheran ecumenical dialogues with this story. Ecumenical discussions, after all, generally focus on confessional texts and the subtleties of theological doctrine, not stories drawn from dusty seventeenth-century tomes. Yet to a significant degree, Mennonite understandings of Christian faith are inextricably rooted in story and memory.² In sharp contrast to the teaching authority of the Catholic magisterium, the doctrinal precision of Calvin's *Institutes*, or the enduring power of the Augsburg Confession within the Lutheran tradition, Mennonites have not generally anchored their ecclesial unity in institutional structures, propositional doctrines, or confessional statements.

Although they do not disdain these forms, Mennonites are much more inclined to frame their understanding of faith in the medium of stories—stories of God's presence in history as revealed in Scripture, but also stories of the formative events of their origins in the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century and of the ordinary

lives of Christian disciples today. Mennonites tend to think about their faith in incarnational terms—God made visible in human form.

Thus, Mennonites were a bit bewildered at how to respond in the late 1970s when Lutheran church leaders in Germany invited them to participate in a celebration commemorating the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. On the one hand, Mennonites and Lutherans have lived peacefully alongside each other for several centuries. They have joined together in local service projects, participated in community worship events, attended each other's seminaries, and cooperated in providing aid to victims of natural disasters around the world. Nonetheless, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 "condemns" the Anabaptist forebears of contemporary Mennonites in at

least five different articles. And for Mennonites those condemnations are inevitably associated with historical memories of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom.

In the decades following that awkward encounter in 1980, Lutherans in several different countries invited Mennonites into conversation regarding the Augsburg Confession. Bilateral dialogues between Lutherans and Mennonites in France (1981–1984), Germany (1989–1992), and the United States (2001–2004) all explored the contemporary relevance of the condemnations of the sixteenth century and sought ways to heal some of the painful memories of the past. These dialogues provided the foundation for an International Study Commission, convened by leaders from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), to review the findings of the national dialogues and to “consider whether condemnations of Anabaptists articulated by the Augsburg Confession (1530) apply to Mennonite World Conference member churches.” Between 2005 and 2008, members of the Study Commission gathered each summer for nearly a week of intensive conversations in Strasbourg, home to the Lutheran Institute for Ecumenical Research as well as the central offices of the Mennonite World Conference.

The focal point of those conversations was the Augsburg Confession, written by Luther’s closest associates in 1530 in an attempt to persuade the Holy Roman Emperor of the theological orthodoxy of their emerging evangelical movement. Because the writers of the confession were intent on distancing themselves from any hint of heresy, they were especially emphatic about disassociating their movement from that of the Anabaptists, whom the Diet of Speyer only a year earlier had determined to be so dangerous to public order that they could be executed without a trial.

As with the national dialogues, members of the Study Commission quickly noted that, in several instances

where the Augsburg Confession condemned the Anabaptists, the authors of the text were simply misinformed about Anabaptist teachings. At other points, they agreed that isolated Anabaptists may have indeed held to a belief condemned by the Augsburg Confession, but these teachings were never part of the enduring Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition.

However, regarding the doctrines of baptism (Article IX) and the Christian’s relation to the state (Article XVI), the Commission recognized that the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession could not be set aside so easily, since Mennonites have continued to embrace teachings that are in tension with the positions set forth in the Lutheran Confessions. Mennonites, for example, believe that baptism should follow public repentance of sin and include a conscious statement of commitment to the congregation of one’s readiness to follow Jesus in daily life. This, they believe, is not something that an infant can do. Most Mennonites also continue to regard the use of all lethal violence—even by the police or military—as inconsistent with Christian discipleship. On these points, contemporary Mennonites generally remain “guilty” of the charges made against them in the Augsburg Confession.

So how should the condemnations of the Anabaptists on these points be interpreted today? Initially, both sides were quick to propose solutions that revealed a lack of understanding about the essential characteristics of the other group. If portions of the Augsburg Confession were factually wrong—or were no longer relevant, or were theologically inconsistent with current beliefs—then, Mennonites suggested, Lutherans should simply change the wording of the text. Mennonites have embraced various confessions of faith through the centuries and they are generally quite ready to revise the language of these statements as the cultural context shifts or as they are led to a fuller understanding of God’s word. For the Lutheran mem-

bers of the Commission, of course, this proposal was inconceivable. The Augsburg Confession—along with the larger body of documents gathered in the Book of Concord—is a foundational and authoritative historical document central to the ecclesial unity of the Lutheran church. The text of the “Unaltered Augsburg Confession” cannot be casually amended.

Lutherans, for their part, suggested early on that the whole matter might be resolved if Mennonites would simply distance themselves from the “Anabaptists” named in the Confession: condemnations of sixteenth-century “Anabaptists” did not apply to contemporary “Mennonites.” Mennonites, however, found this to be an

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equally untenable solution. Although much has changed from the time of the Reformation, Mennonites nonetheless continue to think of themselves as being in direct theological continuity with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. The stories of the Anabaptist martyrs are an especially important element of Mennonite ecclesial identity. Anchored in the model of Jesus—the first martyr—and rooted in a long train of witnesses who suffered for their commitment to follow Christ, the Anabaptist martyrs remind contemporary Mennonites that they have a faith worth dying for. Remembering the martyrs is a way of giving voice

to those whose tongues were torn out before their deaths or who were forced into silence by iron tonguescrews. Their stories of nonresistant suffering caution Mennonites against the temptation to justify violence in the name of Christ; they witness to the possibility of “enemy love” even in the most

Some Lutheran theologians—notably Johannes Brenz—joined the Anabaptists in their insistence that religious beliefs should not be coerced.

extreme circumstances; and they call Mennonites to a life of compassion and humility, while reminding them that nonresistant love is not likely to be rewarded.³ The English edition of *The Martyrs Mirror*, reprinted nearly twenty times in the past century, continues to sell several thousand copies each year. Throughout the 1990s, a traveling exhibit on *The Martyrs Mirror* itinerated in more than sixty Mennonite and Amish communities across North America, accompanied by local lectures, children’s activities, and discussion groups. A recent collection of Anabaptist martyr stories has been translated into nine different languages and found an eager readership among the global Mennonite church.⁴

Thus, the Commission needed to move forward in a way that both honored the enduring authority of the Augsburg Confession within the Lutheran tradition while also recognizing the historical continuity that joins the Anabaptists condemned by the Augsburg Confession with contemporary Mennonites. This meant that the journey toward theological convergence on church-dividing issues would need to begin by addressing questions of history and memory.

Because our churches were born in the cauldron of conflict, we have each developed patterns of memory that have helped to reinforce our convictions that we were on the right side of history; and, whether consciously or not, we have also tended to view each other through the lens of the past in ways that help to justify the rightness of our cause. How we remember that past—a story filled with passionate conviction, acrimonious debate, religious courage, political upheaval, and, for Mennonites at least, memories of imprisonment, torture, and execution—continues to shape our understanding of the present. As the great Southern novelist William Faulkner once wrote: “The past is never dead. It’s not even the past.”⁵

Thus, rather than attempting to reconcile the theological differences that may still divide us, the Study Commission first set itself the task of writing a joint history of our beginnings with the goal of “right remembering.” “Right remembering” meant a mutual commitment to recount the historical details as honestly and accurately as possible, in such a way that each of us could recognize ourselves in the story that emerges. “Right remembering” also committed us to allow our stories to be judged by the larger drama of God’s movement in history, alert to the ways in which the gift of God’s grace that we rightfully celebrate within our traditions cannot be separated from repentance and confession.

Finally, a commitment to “right remembering” should transform us. If nothing changes in our attitudes, convictions, or practices as a result of our encounter with each other’s version of the past—if ecumenical dialogue is little more than church theologians hammering out the nuances of doctrine so as to reach some minimal linguistic agreement—then we probably have not remembered “rightly.” “Right remembering” should make all of us better Christians, drawing us into closer communion with God and with each other.

Whether or not our joint retelling of Anabaptist-Lutheran beginnings has the potential to transform our communities remains to be seen. But the commitment to “right remembering” has made my own telling of the familiar Anabaptist story much more complicated.

First, although this did not come as a new insight, I was reminded again of the fluidity and diversity of early Anabaptism. The grassroots character of the movement, combined with the challenges of communication and the need for secrecy in the face of persecution, meant that outsiders were justifiably confused about Anabaptist teachings in the late 1520s. Rumors abounded, information was hard to verify, and the movement itself was not always unified. So some of the accusations regarding Anabaptist beliefs that appear in the Augsburg Confession simply reflected the general confusion of the times.

In a similar way, writing the story with a view to the Lutheran perspective gave me a new appreciation for the fragility of the evangelical movement in the first decades of its existence. One central goal of the Augsburg Confession was to refute the Catholic charge that they, like the Anabaptists, were trying to create a new church. When the authors of the Augsburg Confession condemned the Anabaptists, their primary concern was not to develop a carefully nuanced theological refutation of Anabaptist doctrine but rather to convince Catholic authorities that they had nothing to do with the heresy of “rebaptism.”

Third, although today the principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience are firmly established in the constitutions of most Western democracies, assumptions regarding religion and politics were radically different in the sixteenth century. To be sure, some Lutheran theologians—notably Johannes Brenz—joined the Anabaptists in their insistence that religious beliefs should not be coerced. But for more than a millennium, European Christendom had simply

assumed that secular and religious authority would be intertwined. In the sixteenth-century context, a Christian prince had an obligation to maintain the unity of the church and to protect innocent souls from the infection of heresy. Anabaptist teachings on baptism, along with their criticism of the oath and the Christian use of the sword, seemed to undermine the very foundations of political, social, and religious order.⁶ Moreover, an imperial law ratified at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 made it illegal for any prince in the empire to tolerate Anabaptists in their territories. All this does not justify the juridical execution of nearly three thousand Anabaptists; but it does make the response of authorities a bit more understandable.

Further, “right remembering” for Mennonite historians means that we will need to be much more precise in our descriptions of those responsible for the execution of Anabaptists. Although the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession certainly made it easier for Lutheran princes to execute Anabaptists, still, in comparison to Catholic and Reformed authorities, Lutheran princes were comparatively mild in their treatment of the Anabaptists—only a relatively small number of Anabaptists was actually executed within Lutheran territories. Indeed, even after Philip Melancthon made a strong case that Anabaptists should be executed on the grounds of blasphemy as well as sedition, Philip of Hesse—who had signed the Augsburg Confession—chose not to follow his counsel.⁷

Finally, conversations with Lutherans revealed ways in which the Mennonite focus on the martyr heritage can easily become unhealthy and even sinful. At times, cultivating a memory of victimhood has fostered in Mennonites a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance that blinds us to the human frailties that are deeply woven also into our tradition. On occasion, remembering the Anabaptist martyrs has reinforced a deeper tendency in Mennonite theology to think of their

relations with other groups in stark, dualistic language: as either intolerant persecutors or heroic victims—thereby reducing the complex story of the sixteenth century to a simple morality tale in which historical actors are easily identified as either Christlike or evil. Most of the most bitter conflicts in the world right now—whether in the Middle East, Iraq, India, or the U.S.—are fueled by precisely this sort of selective, and often triumphalist, memory.

The historical portion of our work attempts to incorporate these insights, along with an equally careful and critical reading of the Lutheran response to the Anabaptists, as a step in the direction of “right remembering.”

As Lutherans around the world prepare to gather for the upcoming world assembly of the LWF in Stuttgart this July, Mennonites recognize that the condemnations of the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession will not be the most important item on the agenda. We also recognize that Mennonites and Lutherans are likely to react to formal statements regarding the condemnations very differently. Most Lutherans are likely not even aware of the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession and would not normally associate those condemnations with contemporary Mennonites, Hutterites, or Amish.⁸

For Mennonites, by contrast, the stories of persecution and suffering from the sixteenth century have remained central to their self-understanding, in both positive and negative ways. For much of their five hundred-year history, groups in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have lived with the “anxiety of difference.” As a minority, Mennonites carry with them a sense of being out of step with history. For centuries they were brushed aside in the standard church history textbooks as the “deformation of the Reformation”: caricatured as wild-eyed anarchists, dismissed as irrelevant idealists, or denounced as disloyal citi-

zens in times of war for their nonresistant convictions. In a modern context that celebrates assimilation, many Mennonites today yearn for acceptance in the mainstream.

It is not surprising, then, that Mennonite responses to Lutheran overtures of reconciliation have been deeply emotional. In June of 2009, several thousand Mennonite participants at the biannual assembly of Mennonite Church USA in Columbus, Ohio, listened in rapt silence as Michael Trice, an ecumenical officer of the ELCA, expressed “profound regret” for the condemnations and enmity that characterized our communions in the sixteenth century. His words were met with sustained and fervent applause, with many in the audience visibly weeping. That same reaction was repeated only a few weeks later when Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the LWF, expressed similar sentiments of regret and a request for forgiveness at the gathering of the Mennonite World Conference in Asunción, Paraguay. Indeed, the emotional highpoint of the entire assembly came immediately following those words when six thousand attendees watched in awe as two sons of Zimbabwe—Ishmael Noko and Denisa Ndlova, the incoming president of MWC—embraced each other on stage. For a tiny group that has lived under the shadow of persecution, such expressions of reconciliation are profoundly moving.

The document submitted by the Study Commission and approved by the LWF General Council in October of 2009 is not perfect. Undoubtedly, it will elicit a range of opinions from theologians, historians, pastors, and laypeople in both the Mennonite and Lutheran communities. Moreover, the document frankly acknowledges our ongoing differences in several important areas of faith and practice. But the report of the Study Commission marks a historical step forward in the history of our two communions. It is our fervent hope that rightly remembering our shared story in the future will, with the help of the Holy

Spirit, mark a step in the healing of this part of the broken body of Christ and offer an authentic witness to the freedom that comes through Christ in mutual vulnerability and forgiveness.

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Notes

1. Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1950), 453, 454.

2. A word of clarification may be helpful here regarding the term “Mennonite.” Because the word “Anabaptist” (German *Wiedertäufer*, literally “rebaptizer”) was so closely associated with heresy and sedition in its popular usage in the sixteenth century, those within the movement used other terms to identify themselves. Over time, the influence of Menno Simons—a former Catholic priest, a theologian, and an influential Dutch leader—spread to other branches of the movement, thanks especially to

his articulate defense of the voluntary church and the gospel of peace. Although some European groups continued to refer to themselves with other variations (e.g., *Taufgesinnten*; *Doopsgezinden*; *Anabaptiste*; *Täufer*), the general term “Mennonite” eventually came to dominate, especially in North America. Today the word “Anabaptist” has no pejorative overtones in English and, indeed, has become a useful umbrella term to encompass a wide variety of groups within the Mennonite World Conference (including, for example, the Brethren in Christ).

3. As historian James Juhnke has written, the martyr stories “prepare us for the possibility of persecution and marginalization in our own time—especially as our pacifist convictions become unpopular in a war-crusading America.” “Rightly Remembering a Martyr Heritage,” unpublished paper presented to the ELCA-Mennonite Liaison Committee dialogue held in Sarasota, Florida, February 28, 2003, p. 1.

4. For more on the traveling exhibit, see www.bethelks.edu/kauffman/martyrs/, accessed January 6, 2010. See also the book written to accompany the exhibit, John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Mar-*

tyrs (Intercourse: Good Books, 1990).

5. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 92.

6. *Schriften von Evangelischer Seite gegen die Täufer*, ed. Robert Stupperich (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983).

7. For a photomechanical reproduction of the text of Melancthon’s memorandum to Philip of Hesse, along with an English translation, see “Whether Christian Princes are Obligated to Apply Physical Punishment and the Sword Against the Unchristian Sect of the Anabaptists (1536),” trans. Leonard Gross, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76 (2002): 315–335.

8. The Hutterites, whose origins date back to the early 1530s, were a group of Anabaptists characterized by the distinctive practice of community of goods. Today approximately 45,000 Hutterites live in some four thousand colonies scattered across the western states of the U.S. and the provinces of Canada. The Amish, who take their name from an early leader, Jakob Ammann, emerged in the 1690s as a renewal movement among the Swiss Anabaptists. Their hymnal, the *Ausbund*, dates back to 1564 and contains many martyr ballads that are still sung today.

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THE PRENATAL THEOLOGY OF CATHARINA REGINA VON GREIFFENBERG

Joy Schroeder

“Blessed be the fruit of the womb of Mary, Jesus Christ! Blessed be all the fluids and all the moisture! Blessed be its growth and formation from minute to minute, from moment to moment!” With these exuberant words, the Lutheran devotional writer Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg (1633–1694) began her detailed literary adoration of the prenatal Christ, enumerating each of his developing body parts and praising “this blessed fruit from the top of His head to the soles of His feet” (276; sw 3:280).¹

Greiffenberg, an Austrian baroness and poet, was renowned during her own lifetime but is little known to later generations. Remaining loyal to her Lutheran faith in a Roman Catholic society that was generally hostile toward her religious tradition, she composed baroque verse and inspirational prose that appealed to Roman Catholics as well as Lutherans.² Deeply devoted to the Virgin Mary—within Lutheran parameters—and to the incarnation and passion of Christ, she expressed theologically sophisticated concepts in poetic language that abounded with heartfelt emotion. While interpreting the Bible, she drew upon numerous theological works, including patristic literature and the writings of Martin Luther, as well as her own experience as a woman. As a female Lutheran theologian, poet, and biblical interpreter, Greiffenberg speaks to present-day readers with a seventeenth-century voice that is unique.

A Lutheran Noblewoman

When Greiffenberg³ was born into a baronial family in Lower Austria in 1633, the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) was still raging. The Peace of Westphalia, negotiated in 1648, granted each territory’s leader the right to choose religion for the region’s inhabitants. This treaty had profound effects on the course of Greiffenberg’s life. Prior to

the Thirty Years’ War there had been a general toleration of Lutherans in Austria, but in the mid-seventeenth century there was a Jesuit-led process of “aggressive re-Catholicization.”⁴ Greiffenberg’s family was part of a beleaguered Protestant remnant. In Lower Austria, which was ruled by a Roman Catholic monarch, Lutheran noblemen and women were permitted personal confessional liberty, but they were not allowed to have Lutheran pastors or teachers. Several times a year, Lutherans made arduous journeys to places such as Pressburg, Hungary (now Bratislava, Slovakia), to receive communion.⁵ Eventually most Lutherans—including Greiffenberg herself—emigrated to Lutheran lands.

Catharina was born into a Lutheran family that owned the Seisenegg castle and estate, located in the northeastern region of Austria, bordering the lands that are now Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Before Catharina’s birth, her pregnant mother, Eva Maria, Baroness von Pranck zu Reinthal und Frondsberg (d. 1675), was afraid that the child would be miscarried. Inspired by the vow of Hannah to offer Samuel to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:9–28), Eva Maria made a similar promise, dedicating her unborn daughter to God’s service.⁶ Eva Maria’s own piety shaped Catharina, who believed she was destined to serve God as a celibate virgin. Their fortunes changed after the death of Catharina’s father, Johann Gottfried von Greiffenberg (1575–1641). Like many widows at that time, Eva Maria had to contend with her deceased husband’s aggressive creditors. Johann Gottfried’s half-brother Hans Rudolf von Greiffenberg (1608–1677) took on the role of protector, settling debts by selling a portion of the inheritance. Hans Rudolf also served as guardian for his two half-nieces, Catharina and her sister Anna Regina.⁷

Catharina was about seven years old at the time of her father’s death. Her uncle oversaw her studies. Since she

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was female, she could not attend a university, but Catharina received an extensive humanistic education from private tutors and personal study of the contents of her family's substantial library. She studied Luther's translation of the Bible. As a young woman she learned Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish. Later in her life she also studied Greek and Hebrew.⁸ She had read the works of the church fathers, Bernard of Clairvaux, Johannes Tauler, and more recent texts such as Johann Arndt's proto-Pietist book, *True Christianity*. She also read widely in science, anatomy, and physiology, works that she later drew upon when discussing the fetal development of the unborn Christ.⁹

Though relatively few seventeenth-century women received this sort of humanist education, it was not unheard of. Elsewhere in Europe, especially in Italy, wealthy families engaged in "conspicuous consumption" by educating their daughters in the apparently unpractical (for women) subjects of Latin, Greek, philosophy, and literature.¹⁰ Such learning was regarded as ornamental in females. Learned men (especially middle-class *litterati* who sought the patronage of wealthy families) hyperbolically praised these learned women, particularly when the girls were still young and unmarried.¹¹ Eventually Catharina herself acquired such a devoté, the humanist Sigmund von Birken (1626–1681), who remained a loyal friend throughout her life.¹²

Hans Rudolf, thirty years older than Catharina, delighted in providing his young niece with an education, but his attention was a mixed blessing, for he also began to discuss the possibility of marriage to her. Catharina, convinced that she was called to celibacy and troubled by the prospects of wedding a close blood relative, continually resisted her uncle's pressure to marry. Strictly speaking, marriage between an uncle and niece was not permitted in either Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, but officials on both sides were willing to grant a dispensation in

order to keep Hans Rudolf in or convert him to their faith. Lynne Tatlock, who translated a portion of Greiffenberg's corpus, comments on Hans Rudolf's affections:

Did her uncle really love her? Their contemporaries thought so. Indeed, it does not require a large stretch of the imagination to suppose that Hans Rudolf might have become very fond of the woman whose intellectual development and literary talent he had fostered... Yet in aristocratic circles, material considerations and not affection typically constituted the decisive factor in marriage choices. In this case, marriage of niece and uncle prevented a division of the Greiffenberg property and promised a bit of financial stability for the entire family. Hans Rudolf no doubt had multiple reasons for loving Catharina so ardently.¹³

Catharina refused her uncle's marriage proposals for many years. Finally, in 1663, aware that her uncle—who had become very ill from "lovesickness"—was considering becoming Roman Catholic, Catharina decided that she was called to marriage for the sake of her uncle's physical and spiritual health.¹⁴ She wedded him in a Lutheran ceremony in 1664. By this time Catharina was thirty-one. The marriage, performed in Lutheran territory near Nuremberg, provoked numerous legal problems—including Hans Rudolf's arrest—when the couple returned to Lower Austria. The newly wedded Catharina interceded effectively on her husband's behalf.¹⁵ An amorous letter written by Catharina to her groom suggests that she had overcome her aversion to marital relations.¹⁶ However, the couple never had any children.

Greiffenberg, deeply devout, experienced a profound spiritual revelation while receiving communion at a Lutheran service in Hungary. Her eucharistic devotion was probably heightened by the fact that she

was only able to attend communion services several times a year after expending great effort to travel to Lutheran worship. In response to her inner awakening, she felt called to glorify God through her devotional verse and prose. Using printers in Nuremberg, she published a collection of sonnets and other poetry (1662), meditations on Christ's passion and suffering (1672), meditations on Jesus' incarnation and youth (1678), and

As a biblical interpreter, Greiffenberg consciously attended to the stories of women's roles in the life of Jesus, particularly at the times of his birth and his death. In her 1672 Meditations on the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, she used the gospel narratives to defend her gender and justify her own writing.

meditations on Jesus' life and teaching (1693). Greiffenberg also worked on a book about Christ's resurrection and ascension, but the manuscript—like the majority of her writing—is lost.¹⁷

At various points in her life she made visits to Vienna, unsuccessfully attempting to gain an audience with Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria, for the purpose of trying to convert him to the Lutheran faith.¹⁸ Following her husband's death in 1677, Greiffenberg lost the family's castle to creditors. In

1680 she emigrated to Nuremberg, a Lutheran city, where she found fellowship and actively participated in literary societies during the final fourteen years of her life. According to Kathleen Foley-Beining, “[t]here her unhindered religious and literary life and the early Pietist, devotional meetings with her ‘innig freunde’ (intimate friends) made her last years in exile the best of her life.”¹⁹ She died in 1694 on Easter Monday.²⁰

Theology and the Female Voice

As a biblical interpreter, Greiffenberg consciously attended to the stories of women’s roles in the life of Jesus, particularly at the times of his birth and death. In her 1672 *Meditations on the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ*, she used the gospel narratives to defend her gender and justify her own writing: “The panacean seed of woman did not reject women, refusing to be served by them. Since He dignified them by his own being made flesh of a woman, He therefore also found them worthy to witness his death. He wanted to begin His life emerging from this sex and to end it in their company” (69; sw 9:13). Greiffenberg notes the loyalty and faithfulness of Jesus’ female followers in the Gospels, commenting on the large number of women who followed Jesus from Galilee (Matthew 27:55), “Not merely a few, but many women were standing with those intimates afar off. The female sex has always been devoted and attached to our dear Lord Jesus” (110; sw 10:827). She uses the presence of the women at the crucifixion to criticize misogynists who say that women are “incapable of salvation” (111; sw 10:827).²¹ Greiffenberg argues that, in fact, women are usually *more* faithful than men: “But in general the fear of God has always found more of a place with women’s simplicity than with men’s cunning, and they have always followed Christ in greater numbers and more frequently, as did then these women from Galilee” (111; sw 10:827).

Greiffenberg asserts that the presence of these loyal women in the scriptural record is no accident, for the “trustworthy recorder, the Holy Spirit” ensured that the deeds of Mary Magdalene and the female followers of Jesus would be remembered (129; sw 10:899). Greiffenberg asserts: “This happens perhaps because poor womenfolk, on account of being completely despised and defamed by most men, seek and find their honor in the apologia of the Holy Spirit” (130; sw 10:900). We find another defense of women in Greiffenberg’s meditation on Elizabeth’s greeting of Mary at the visitation (Luke 1:42). The meditation



Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg

includes a veritable roll call of female saints, martyrs, and other exemplary women such as Agnes, Catherine of Alexandria, Paula of Rome, Perpetua, and Felicity, demonstrating that “not only Elizabeth but innumerable other women have been filled and will yet be filled with the Holy Spirit” (209; sw 3:154). It would be anachronistic to call Greiffenberg a feminist but, like many women writers of her era, she defended the female sex from what she felt were unjust accusations that women were innately immoral and intellectually inferior.

Greiffenberg compared her own life and her writing on Christ’s passion to the nard poured out by the woman in Mark 14:3, whose act of devotion

was criticized by men but defended by Christ (69; sw 9:14–15). She also used the domestic imagery of spinning and weaving (combined with a classical reference to Ariadne’s thread in the labyrinth) to describe her literary production: “Let these swaddling clothes of Jesus be the thread that winds Thy glory out of the labyrinth and suffers it to be worshiped by the entire world. If I have achieved this, then I have achieved enough and well invested my time and industry, which have my whole life long spun and woven this thread and these swaddling clothes” (158; sw 3:iv, b). But God, too, is a weaver—the “Eternal Weaver” Who created humanity (149; sw 10:941). Furthermore, at the incarnation, God the Son lingered in Mary’s womb as “the embroidery and tapestry of this holy humanity was worked” (184; sw 3:107).

Some of Greiffenberg’s praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary rivals the accolades offered by Roman Catholic writers. Mary is a “Wonder-Mother” [*Wunder-Mutter*] (236; sw 3:237). She is “blessed above all the empresses and queens on earth” as “the bride of God the Father, a mother of God the Son, and the workshop of the Holy Spirit” (172; sw 3:84–5). Following classical Lutheran tradition, Greiffenberg assumes the perpetual virginity of Mary and her “corporal integrity”—an unbroken hymen during and following Jesus’ birth (181; sw 3:101). She believes in Mary’s lifetime abstinence from sexual relations with Joseph despite their lawful marriage.²² She imagines the conception of Jesus to have been a mystical experience for Mary: “As God entered her body, her spirit must have flown away into God. As the spirit of God wrought the body of Christ in and from her body, her spirit must have brooded God’s praise and glory... The power of the Most High over her, the Son of God in her body, and the Holy Spirit in her spirit must have moved her so that she was nearly immobile and breathless from worship, love and laudation” (200; sw 138–39).

Greiffenberg repeatedly speaks of the Blessed Virgin in exalted terms, but she carefully defines the Protestant limits. She puts words into the mouth of Christ's mother, who defends herself against too much praise. Greiffenberg's Mary asserts, "And even if over the centuries people should arise who praised me for my person and not just merely and purely for the divine grace [that I received], but instead wanted to ascribe the slightest part of it to my merit, I hereby aver—with divine true knowledge, in complete illumination of spirit—that I would not favor it. Nor would it please me; rather it would offend and pain me if the tiniest speck of dust of God's honor were to be taken from Him and attributed to me" (223–4; sw 3:185). The chief reason to honor the Virgin Mary is her role in the incarnation, conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. As we will see, Greiffenberg regarded the development of Christ's body in Mary's womb to be a source of profound wonder and mystery.

*Christ's Incarnation
and the Fate of Stillborn Babies*

Greiffenberg was intensely interested in what Lynne Tatlock has termed the "interuterine Christ."²³ In her 1678 publication, *The Incarnation, Birth, and Youth of Jesus Christ*, Greiffenberg is effusive in her praise of the mystery and paradox of the incarnation, as Jesus—simultaneously divine and human—developed in the womb of Mary. She articulates a sophisticated incarnational theology in poetic terms using the metaphor of water for Jesus' humanity and fire for his divinity.

He is thereby a God-with-us. Not that God turned into humankind or humankind turned into God; rather, he was united with it. Also not that He devoured it like a consuming fire or that the light of His divinity was extinguished by it like a sea; rather God-with-us so that both natures persisted substantially in a unity and in an

*unnatural nature*²⁴ unique to Him alone. So they remained intact and unquenched—the water of humankind in the midst of the fire of divinity in the sea of humankind... (270; sw 3:266)

Greiffenberg then praises Christ anatomically. Every imaginable body part of the prenatal Christ is lauded

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for its own sake and also for the devotional or symbolic lesson it portrays. For instance, she blesses "the glassy moisture in the lovely little eyes that thereby makes the glass of our weakness [hard] like steel" and "the lovely little milk teeth from which the sweet milk of the Gospel sprang forth for us"

(278–79; sw 3:283–84). Praising the unborn Christ's newly forming body, she blesses his brain's various "chambers," his nose, temples, and the "artful hourglass of the ears... that spiral in and go to the smith and workshop of hearing, which is enclosed between two walls or membranes" (279–80; sw 3:284). Greiffenberg attends to Jesus' developing arms, sinews, muscles, cartilage, fingers, ribs, thighs, loins, liver, aorta, and pulmonary artery. Kathleen Foley-Beining remarks, "Interweaving the symbolic and spiritual with the anatomically exact, she creates an impassioned exaltation imbued with richly layered levels of meaning."²⁵

Throughout her praise, Greiffenberg demonstrates knowledge of fetal development that became current in the seventeenth century—a modern view that contradicted earlier beliefs that "the adult human already exists in complete form and in miniature in the sperm and thus simply increases in size in the uterus."²⁶ Foley-Beining notes, "Greiffenberg was well informed about contemporary understandings of the physiological processes involved in the growth of a fetus, adhering to the modern theory of epigenesis and rejecting the outmoded theory of preformation of the fetus which Luther had espoused."²⁷

From Greiffenberg's perspective, Christ's time spent in the womb had pastoral implications for parents whose babies were miscarried, stillborn, or died unbaptized shortly after birth. Greiffenberg dealt with the question of salvation of infants who die unbaptized. Ever since the time of Luther, Protestant pastors had endeavored to offer comfort to mothers whose babies were miscarried, stillborn, or died before baptism, assuring them that parents need not despair. At a time that experienced a high infant mortality rate, Greiffenberg offers a compelling rationale for the salvation of unbaptized infants of Christian parents. Addressing these concerns, she speaks of Christ's own incarnation, his nine months in Mary's womb, and John the Baptist's prenatal inter-

action with the unborn Jesus (Luke 1:44). Parents who lost children before baptism need not despair, for Christ's "lying in the womb" sanctified other babies in their own mothers' wombs.

For this reason Christian parents should not be too saddened by the loss of their unborn, and thus unbaptized, children. God is not limited by His own conditions and means; to be sure He can hold dispensing with baptism against a person if baptism is disparaged, but not when it is impossible to carry it out. His lying in the womb saved those in the womb as well; if He had not intended thereby to benefit them, then perhaps he would have come into the world in another way. But for the sake of babes lying in the womb He too lay in the womb, thereby intending to make them holy and to take them into heaven. (204; SW 3:146–47)

More than a century earlier, Martin Luther had written a treatise to comfort women whose babies were miscarried or stillborn. Luther had inherited and rejected the teaching about limbo, which asserted that babies who are stillborn or die unbaptized are not punished in hell but, nevertheless, would not receive the full blessedness of the beatific vision enjoyed by the baptized. In his 1542 treatise, *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage*, Luther said that "because the mother is a believing Christian it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer."²⁸ Knowing that many newborn infants die only a few hours or days after birth, Luther said that God certainly had not rejected Israelite boys who died prior to their circumcision on the eighth day: "Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God willed to be

their God."²⁹ As proof of the efficacy of parental prayers, Luther also provided examples of children healed by Christ due to the parents' requests.³⁰

Thus, in a pastoral response to the anguish of mothers who suffered miscarriage or whose babies were stillborn, Martin Luther had asserted that God *might* accept the mother's desire for the unborn child's eventual baptism as an unspoken but heartfelt prayer. He said that "it is to be hoped"

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that a merciful God might have mercy on the child for the sake of this prayer.³¹ Though his attempts to comfort mothers express hope, Luther is somewhat cautious in his assertions—perhaps because he does not find a clear and distinct promise about it in Scripture.

Greiffenberg's assertions about the salvation of unbaptized children of Christian parents are more confident than Luther's. Interestingly, her asser-

tions draw upon many of the arguments that Luther himself had used to defend infant baptism against Anabaptist arguments. For instance, in 1528, Luther had written, "When they say, 'Children cannot believe,' how can they be sure of that? Where is the Scripture by which they would prove it and on which they would build? They imagine this, I suppose, because children do not speak or have understanding. But such a fancy is deceptive, yea, altogether false, and we cannot build on what we imagine. There are Scripture passages that tell us that children may and can believe, though they do not speak or understand."³² Luther then uses the example of John the Baptist—who believed in Christ while in his mother's womb—to posit the possibility of an "infant faith" that a baptized baby could experience. He asserts, "And St. John was a child in his mother's womb [Luke 1:41] but, as I believe, could have faith."³³ Luther continues, "What if all children in baptism not only were able to believe but believed as well as John in his mother's womb?"³⁴ Since Christ, who is present, "speaks, and baptizes, why should not his Word and baptism call forth spirit and faith in the child as then it produced faith in John?"³⁵

In her interpretation of the story of the visitation, Greiffenberg goes beyond Luther's claims, attributing to unborn infants a dynamic, vibrant faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul's insistence that the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:26) means that babies and even unborn infants offer prayer and praise to God.

The Holy Spirit is not bound to human reason, age, tongue, or mouth but so free in His movements that He can communicate them to children before they have acquired reason and the use of their mouths and tongues. The Holy Spirit can make God's praise peal forth from those who are not yet capable of speaking and make not only those in

the cradle but those lying in the womb liven and quicken, as he does here with the unborn John. (202; sw 3:143)

Even though his body was not completely formed, the prenatal John offered praise to his Savior.

The Holy Spirit sets a half-grown, still premature babe ablaze with joy just as he once did a glorious king so that he danced before the Ark of the Covenant. The Spirit suffers the little legs and limbs, which are still quite soft and incomplete, to move and leap for joy toward the Savior. Before the little feet have their little footsteps, toes, and little nails, they desire, through the driving force of the Spirit, to walk toward their Savior, who is still younger and even less grown. (203; sw 3:144)

John's leaping in his mother's womb demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is active and working within the unborn child to inspire faith. Greiffenberg offers a charming description of the unborn baby as a "dependent little guest" of the pregnant mother, who is *especially* moved to receive communion during her pregnancy. The fetus itself benefits from the eucharist when the pregnant mother communes. Greiffenberg expects that many other women, like Elizabeth, feel their children leaping in the womb as they encounter Christ, who is bodily present in the Lord's Supper. In fact, every pregnant mother who comes to communion is a sort of Elizabeth. Greiffenberg reports that a pregnant friend was receiving communion and felt her baby's first kicks or movements—just as John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb as she greeted Mary.

As soon as a child is alive and even before it has a little mouth, the Holy Spirit emits sighs for eternal life from it. Indeed, the entire Holy Trinity is active within the child before it is fully

a real human being. God the Father, the Almighty Creator, forms its body within its mother's belly. Jesus Christ strengthens it with His holy body and blood while it is still in the womb and rules mothers so that precisely when they can bring along such a dependent little guest they most prefer to go to Holy Communion. Probably many a child leaps in the womb then, and I heard from one of my friends herself that her child quickened and stirred for the first time at the moment she received the holy sacrament. (203–4; sw 3:145)

Here Greiffenberg draws upon female conversation and experience, interweaving it with her biblical interpretation, to offer comfort to other women. She uses principles from Luther about infant faith to make an argument for prenatal faith, but she offers a more vigorous and positive assertion about the salvation of the babies of Christian mothers.

A Lutheran Woman's Voice

Greiffenberg was widely read by her contemporaries but, particularly after baroque poetry went out of fashion, she became virtually unknown to all except experts on seventeenth-century German literature. Recent interest in women's history—and especially the publication of an English translation of some of Greiffenberg's writings—may occasion renewed attention to this remarkable woman. Her life story provides an example of faith during difficult circumstances. As a Lutheran Christian, Greiffenberg testifies to God's grace, shown to humans in the incarnation and passion of Christ. As a poet and theologian, she speaks about God's mysteries using language that is simultaneously controlled and exuberant. As a scholar well-versed in many disciplines, she applies her scientific learning to the task of theology. As a female reader of the Bible, she

interprets Scripture with female experience, addressing the joys, sorrows, and fears of women, especially mothers. Twenty-first-century readers—particularly those who seek Lutheran women's voices in history—can draw inspiration from this remarkable thinker. She characterized her compositions as a sort of handiwork woven in Christ's honor. Greiffenberg herself would hope that any admiration evoked by her writings would redound to the glory of God alone. *LF*

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Notes

1. Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, "The Incarnation of Jesus Christ," in *Meditations on the Incarnation, Passion, and Death of Jesus Christ*, ed. and trans. Lynne Tatlock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 276; Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, "Der Allerheiligsten Menschwerdung, Geburt und Jugend Jesu Christi," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, eds. Martin Bircher and Friedhelm Kemp (Millwood: Kraus Reprint, 1983), 279–80. This article will employ Tatlock's translation. Parenthetical citations from the translation will be followed by the page numbers from *Sämtliche Werke*, the facsimile edition of the seventeenth-century German printed edition of Greiffenberg's writings, here abbreviated as sw.

2. Ute Brandes, "Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg," in *Women Writers in German-Speaking Countries: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, eds. Elke P. Frederiksen and Elizabeth G. Ametsbichler (Westport: Greenwood, 1998), 172.

3. I will usually refer to Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg by her surname, but for the sake of clarity I will use her first name in discussions of other members of the Greiffenberg family.

4. Lynne Tatlock, "Volume Editor's Introduction," in Greiffenberg, 5.

5. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

6. *Ibid.*, 14.

7. Horst-Joachim Frank, *Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg: Leben und Welt der barocken Dichterin* (Göttingen: Sachse & Pohl, 1967), 14–16.

8. Flora Kimmich, *Sonnets of Catharina von Greiffenberg: Methods of Composition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 9. For a more extensive discussion of Greiffenberg's early education, see Frank, *Greiffenberg*,

17–18.

9. Tatlock, 14.

10. Holt N. Parker, “Introduction,” in Olympia Morata, *The Complete Writings of an Italian Heretic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 17.

11. *Ibid.*, 23.

12. Kimmich, 11–14.

13. Tatlock, 15.

14. Kathleen Foley-Beining, *The Body and Eucharistic Devotion in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg’s “Meditations”* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997), 2–3.

15. Brandes, 171.

16. Foley-Beining, 3.

17. Brandes, 175.

18. Frank, 78.

19. Brandes, 172.

20. Frank, 130.

21. In the seventeenth and preceding centuries, numerous male-authored treatises

argued that women were morally and intellectually inferior to men. Women responded to these literary attacks with works of their own. Here Greiffenberg joins the growing ranks of “female defenders of women” such as Amelia Lanyer (1569–1645), author of the frequently anthologized *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (in which Pilate’s wife defends the entire female sex), and Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), who authored *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. and trans. Anne Dunhill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

22. The Latin translation of Luther’s Smalcald Articles calls Mary “ever-virgin.” See *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 300, n. 20. Also see the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VIII, in *The Book of Concord*, 620.

23. Tatlock, ix.

24. In the 1678 edition, the words *unnatürlichen Natur* are printed in larger letters than the rest of the words on this page.

25. Foley-Beining, 68.

26. Greiffenberg, 284, n. 228.

27. Foley-Beining, 66.

28. Martin Luther, “Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage,” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.) [hereafter cited as LW], 43:247–8.

29. LW 43:249.

30. LW 43:250.

31. LW 43:247.

32. Martin Luther, “Concerning Re-baptism,” LW 40:241–2.

33. LW 40:242.

34. *Ibid.*

35. LW 40:242–3.

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WHETHER LAWYERS AND JUDGES, TOO, CAN BE SAVED

Humes Franklin Jr.

In 1523 Martin Luther wrote to his prince, the Duke of Saxony, a treatise called “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed.” The duke was apparently troubled by two passages of Scripture. In Matthew 5:25 and 40, Jesus said, “Do not resist evil, but make friends with your accuser; and if any one should take your coat, let him have your cloak as well.” And in Romans 12:19, Paul—hearkening back to Deuteronomy—said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Those two passages had been used throughout the centuries to argue that Christians should not resist evil and that repaying someone for evil deeds is not the purview of Christians but of God. Some argued that Christians should not wield the temporal sword at all. The Duke of Saxony was uncertain of the extent of his temporal authority. Could he, should he, wield the sword or not?

Luther, of course, steered him in the right direction. Luther cited Romans 13:1, where Paul says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.” He also cited 1 Peter 2:13: “For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by God to punish those who do wrong.” Luther understood that princes and lords, constables and magistrates, all of those holding temporal authority, are God’s servants on earth. They must be obeyed; they certainly can use the sword; and they can even sentence evildoers to death. If not, said Luther, “the world would drop into chaos.”

On the other hand, those in temporal authority must exercise their authority with wisdom, Luther said. He ends his letter to the Duke of Saxony with a good example of just that—the account of a virtuous woman and Duke Charles of Burgundy. The story goes like this.

A certain nobleman took an enemy prisoner. The prisoner’s wife came to ransom her husband. The nobleman promised to return the husband on the condition that she would lie with him. The woman was virtuous, yet wished to set her husband free; so she asked her husband whether she should do this thing in order to free him. The husband wished to save his life, so he gave his wife permission to

sleep with the nobleman. After the nobleman had lain with the wife, he had the husband beheaded—and gave him to her as a corpse.

The woman, quite distraught, laid the case before Duke Charles. The duke summoned the nobleman and commanded him to marry the woman. When the wedding day was over, the duke had the nobleman beheaded, gave the woman possession of the nobleman’s property, and restored her to honor.

Thus, Luther says, “he punished the crime in a princely way.” The duke’s action was a perfect example of how a Christian placed in a position of temporal authority and acting as God’s servant should wield that authority wisely.

A Lawyer and a Christian—at the Same Time

I’m a lifelong Lutheran Christian and a member of a family with deep Lutheran roots. For thirty years I was a lawyer in private practice. For the past twelve years I’ve served the Commonwealth of Virginia as a circuit court judge, having been appointed to that position in 1997. I am here to talk about how a judge who also happens to be a Christian struggles to practice my vocation, in Luther’s words, “in a wise and princely way.”

My dad, who was also a lawyer, loved to tell the story of the time he represented a lady of the evening in court. My dad knew that the judge before whom the case was being tried was a frequent client of the woman. When the judge began sternly to lecture the woman in order to look responsible, she leaned over to him and said, “Now be careful what you say here, Louie.” So I learned early on that it’s pretty dicey being a judge.

When you enter the legal field, you enter a profession that is the target of a million jokes, is regarded by some with very low esteem, and immerses you in a variety of ethical dilemmas. For example, lawyers don’t always represent innocent people in court; quite often they represent clearly guilty people, people who have done horrible things. In my years as an attorney, I saw it all. I represented murderers, adulterers, child molesters, rapists, thieves, drug dealers, and gang members—you name it. On the one hand, you know that everyone is entitled to their day in court and

legal representation. On the other hand, you wonder whether you should be swimming around with such messy people and perhaps providing them the opportunity to escape accountability for what they've done.

Let me say, however, that in spite of all the jokes and justified criticism of lawyers, there are many faithful Christians and people of other religious traditions in the legal profession who act as God's faithful servants on a daily basis. People of faith do make a difference in the legal profession. Believers are steeped in a religious tradition that doesn't disappear when they meet with clients or walk into the courtroom. One of my former colleagues, a very devout Roman Catholic, said about his faith: "You can't wash it off." You don't stop being a person of faith when you become a lawyer.

Now, if you encounter ethical dilemmas when you become a lawyer, you run into even more difficult dilemmas when you become a judge—because as a judge, you play God. Judges determine guilt and innocence. They mete out sentences that alter people's lives and the lives of their families. Judges make decisions regarding custody that can change a child's life in a heartbeat. We can keep people behind bars and we can set them free. And of course we can sentence people to death—in some states at least. If none of that worries you as a judge, if you don't lose sleep over that, you're not paying attention. And if as a judge you also happen to be a Christian, the dilemma becomes more sharply drawn.

You ask yourself, "Should I, as a follower of the one who declared, 'Repay no one evil for evil,' be a member of this profession that does indeed repay evil for evil?" You ask yourself, "Am I able to sentence someone to death if that is what I'm called to do? Can I have someone's death on my conscience for the rest of my life?"

I know that Christians are called to be in the world but not of it. I know that we are called to an alternative

ethic. I've heard the arguments of those in pacifist traditions. Pacifists argue that Jesus called his followers to a way of life of sacrificial love; that Christians must return good for evil; that we must individually love our enemies and freely give to those who hate us; and that we should demand the same from our governments. Pacifists remind us that many Christians in the early church refused to join the Roman army, and that many of those who converted to Christianity while in military service were instructed to refrain from killing, to pray for forgiveness for past acts, and to seek release from their military obligation.

A Lutheran Understanding of Civil Government

As a judge I'm particularly grateful for the Lutheran part of my Christian identity because it has given me a proper framework for understanding what I do for a living. Three things in particular shape that framework.

In 1526 Martin Luther wrote a treatise titled, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved." Luther understood the dilemma of a Christian engaged in a profession that looked to some as anything but Christian; but unlike those in the pacifist traditions, he had a significantly different take on the matter. Luther wrote, "When I think of a soldier fulfilling his office by punishing the wicked, killing the wicked, and creating so much misery, it seems an un-Christian work completely contrary to Christian love. But when I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves wife and child, house and farm, property, and honor and peace, then I see how precious and godly this work is, and I observe that it amputates a leg or a hand, so that the whole body may not perish."

Luther separated himself from pacifism and affirmed the moral legitimacy of the military profession. He called it "a legitimate and godly calling and occupation." The occupation of a soldier, he said, is a function of the temporal sword and temporal gov-

ernment that, according to Romans 13 and 1 Peter, has been instituted by God for the punishment of wrongdoing, the protection of right, and the preservation of temporal peace.

Luther's colleagues built on his insights. Melancthon spelled out in Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession how Lutheran Christians understand the role of civil government. He wrote, "It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, and serve as soldiers." Lutherans are big on doing things for the sake of good order, and the Reformers embraced the good order of civil law.

The final piece that Lutheran Christians bring to the table in shaping a framework for professions like mine is what Lutherans call the doctrine of the two kingdoms. Now, I've been told that there is no official document called "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms" in our confessional writings. I'm also told that there is no treatise in Luther's works that goes by that name. But Lutherans do nonetheless live their lives with a very clear understanding that God exerts his will over human affairs in two ways: through the earthly kingdom and through the spiritual kingdom.

The earthly kingdom refers to that dimension of our lives in which we live in society and are ruled and governed by human laws. The spiritual kingdom refers to that dimension of our lives lived in the church, where we are ruled by forgiveness. The best example I ever heard of the way in which these two kingdoms operate in our lives was in a Sunday school class taught by Pastor Lou Smith. Lou was talking about the doctrine of the two kingdoms and someone asked, "Can you give us an example of how you

as a pastor live out your life as both a person of the earthly kingdom and the spiritual kingdom?”

Lou never ducked a challenge. “Suppose one of my parishioners,” he said, “visits me in the church office on a Monday morning and confesses that they’ve just robbed the supermarket down the street. What do I do? Well, as a pastor,” Lou said, “I invite them to confess their sin of breaking the seventh commandment and in the name of Jesus I absolve them of their sin. And then I invite them to accompany me to the police station where they can turn themselves in and receive the temporal punishment for their sin. That way,” Lou said, “I properly function as a person who stands in two kingdoms, one spiritual and one earthly. In the spiritual kingdom, forgiveness has the final word; in the earthly kingdom, law has the final word.”

For me, the doctrine of the two kingdoms takes away any doubts I might have about whether I as a Lutheran Christian can serve as a judge. Of course I can; and in fact I must. God has called me to this vocation in the earthly kingdom. Through this vocation, in Luther’s words, “God regulates the outward affairs of men, so that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives here upon earth.” Luther understood that “the governing authority is God’s servant,” and that “when the magistrate punishes, God Himself punishes.”

For the sake of good order I render decisions, pass sentences, and punish evildoers to keep the world from collapsing into chaos. And so I see myself not as a human being who just happens to be a judge who acts totally on his own and throws out judgments from the bench willy-nilly. No—I see myself as an instrument through which God metes out justice and cares for this world by keeping it in good order. I am guided by this sense of vocation. In the same way that pastors are called in the spiritual kingdom to ensure that forgiveness has the final word, I am called to serve in the

earthly kingdom to make sure that law has the final word.

Some Case Studies from the Bench

I am a judge in the circuit courts, the level above the district courts but below the appeals court and the state supreme court. Circuit courts handle civil cases like auto accidents, criminal trespassing, and personal injury. They also handle felonies, appeals of misdemeanors, spousal abuse cases, divorce settlements, child custody, spousal support, and visitation.

Let me now take you “beneath the robe,” as it were, and give you some examples of cases in which I have tried as a servant of God in the earthly kingdom to wield my temporal authority in “a wise and princely way.” I usually pray when I get to chambers at the start of the day. I don’t necessarily pray about specific cases; I simply pray that the Spirit might guide me to do what is right and fair. In the pulpit of Grace Lutheran Church in Waynesboro there’s a plaque that reads: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21); it stands as a reminder to the pastors who step into that pulpit what their job is. On the bench in my courtroom sits a plaque that reads: “Remember that they call you ‘Your Honor’ to remind them of theirs.”

What I do is always exposed to public scrutiny. Quite often after a trial there will be letters to the editor in our local newspapers. Sometimes there will be editorials by the newspapers themselves. The general public knows very little about the specifics of the case. More to the point, people know very little about the person who has been sentenced and the specifics of that person’s life.

Most people don’t know how easy it is to spot guilt and innocence in the courtroom. The saying among judges is that “a blind man on a trotting horse can spot guilt and innocence.” The hard part is what you do once guilt has been established. Judges have a manual on sentencing, of course. There are guiding principles

and objectives that need to be taken into consideration when we contemplate the proper sentence. We are to fashion a sentence that protects society, deters the defendant from repeat offenses, upholds respect for the law, provides retribution to the offender, and removes the offender from society whenever that is necessary. We have to take into consideration the nature of the offense, the injury to the victim, whether or not a weapon was used in the crime, the offender’s motive, any past history of juvenile offenses and attempts at rehabilitation, prior drug or alcohol use, marital history, health, employment history, job skills, education, social stability, and the likelihood of recidivism. That’s in the book, and sometimes we observe it to the letter.

But my job is probably like yours a lot of the time. There are times when it’s appropriate to do things by the book and other times when you have to fly by the seat of your pants. We have been appointed to make decisions based upon our knowledge, judgment, and experience; and that’s exactly what we do.

In the fall of 2007 I sentenced a seventeen-year-old young man to life in prison without parole. There were letters in the newspaper saying that my sentence was far too harsh; there were outbursts in the courtroom; there was a threat to my life. But as an instrument through which God metes out justice, the sentence was a no-brainer. The seventeen-year-old was a gang member who shot and killed a twenty-two-year-old at a gas station simply because the man was wearing a blue bandana—the colors of a rival gang—and he wouldn’t take it off when the seventeen-year-old told him to. After the youth was convicted of first-degree murder and awaiting sentencing in jail, he wrote nine rap songs, including one that bragged about how proud he was of killing a member of the rival gang. In a second song he told about how he couldn’t wait to get out on the street and kill again. At his sentencing this young man showed absolutely no remorse about what he

had done. In fact, he was quite defiant, flashing gang signs to some of his friends in the courtroom.

I know that a sentence of life without parole is harsh. It's the full extent of our guidelines—it's the letter of the law—and in this particular case it was the right thing to do.

On the other hand, sometimes I look like a pushover. This past spring one of the Interstate 64 shooters appeared before me for certain offenses that he committed in my jurisdiction—not the shootings that terrorized drivers on the highway in March 2008, but shots fired in Waynesboro. I gave this seventeen-year-old a sentence that was criticized by the local papers as being far too lenient. A look into this young man's life revealed solid signs for the hope of the amendment of his life, however, and so I was guided by that hope. Not all lives are lost to the bad decisions we make.

A specific instance of amendment of life: several years ago a young man stood before me, guilty of the crime of which he had been accused. When it came to sentencing, however, I saw something in him that I thought would be wasted if he were to be saddled with a felony charge. I convicted the man but refused to sentence him. Instead, I put him on five years' supervised probation. At the end of five years I vacated the guilty finding and entered a judgment of not guilty. In those five years the man graduated from high school, found gainful employment, got married, started a family, and is now a productive member of society. I took an educated chance in his case. I trusted a power greater than that of human beings—I was guided by the redemptive spirit that can amend lives, and it paid off.

By far the most difficult cases I handle are those dealing with child custody. Divorce is a horrible trauma in and of itself, and when children are involved, the pain and suffering become even worse. It is very difficult fashioning judgments that are in the best interest of the child, especially when their parents are thinking only

of themselves. And yet sometimes stories of justice and redemption can be found even in the midst of the brokenness of divorce.

Some years ago a young man stood before a judicial colleague of mine and received the temporal punishment for his sins; he was convicted of a felony. He served his time and rejoined society. When his marriage failed, he and his wife fought for the custody of their only child. You can imagine that a convicted felon doesn't stand much of a chance of getting custody of his child, and he didn't. Full custody was given to his soon-to-be former wife. The father wasn't even given visitation rights. It was a victory for the wife, who presented herself in court as the responsible parent over against her irresponsible husband.

Well, parents can hide a lot of things from the light of truth in a six- or eight-hour custody hearing. But over the long haul the truth about who is going to act in the best interest of the child is revealed. And so the judge in charge filed an order giving full custody to the mother on a temporary six-month basis. During those months I had a very close view of the three people involved—not as a member of the judiciary but as a member of the church. It became clear to me that while the mother was a loving and caring parent, there was no valid reason to exclude the father from his daughter's life. Temporal law had been applied, but my faith led me to believe that justice had not been done. So, as the judicial canon of ethics allows, I had a conversation with my colleague.

To make a long story short, and to be purposely vague about the details out of respect for those involved, a mother and a father now have joint custody of a very sweet child who is regularly brought to church where she hears a word from God that Jesus Christ is able to make all things new. She is a child who has seen that newness in her own life. Such a story is proof that some lives can be turned around, and it is proof that judges can

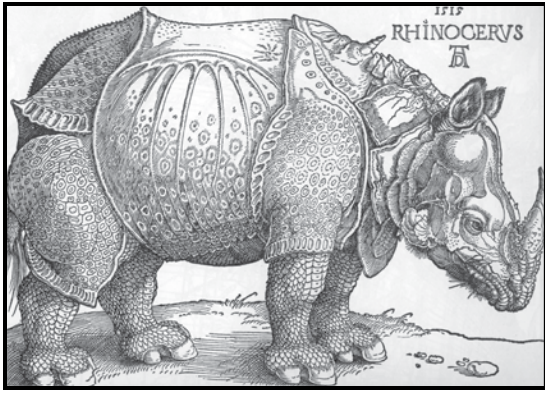
indeed carry out their calling in "a wise and princely way."

In closing, let me mention two things that, more than anything else, steady my ship and keep me honest as a judge who also happens to be a Christian. I regularly read the classic daily devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers. I'm particularly taken by the comments he makes about Paul's words in II Corinthians 5:10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Chambers writes: "If you will learn here and now to live under the scrutiny of Christ's pure light, your final judgment will bring you only delight in seeing the work God has done in you. Live constantly reminding yourself of the judgment seat of Christ, and walk in the knowledge of the holiness he has given you."

I feel myself under the scrutiny of that light on a regular basis at church. The congregation where I am a member, Zion Lutheran Church in Waynesboro, has intercessory prayers every Sunday, as I'm sure your congregation does. My pastor has arranged it so that on a regular basis the assisting minister prays the words of this classic prayer: "Almighty God, you sit in judgment to declare what is just and right. Bless the courts and the magistrates in our land. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that they may perceive the truth and administer the law impartially as instruments of your divine will. We pray in the name of Him who will come to be our judge, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

That always keeps me on my toes, reminding me that I am an instrument of God for the sake of good order. I pray that you have something that keeps you on your toes as well. *LF*

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AND NOW

FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

THE BOOK THAT COST A COW: A LUTHERAN TESTIMONY (OF SORTS)

Piotr J. Matysz

1. *The Book*

The book held pride of place in one of the kitchen cabinets. You could see it very well through the glass door: its thick black covers, the paper yellowish with age. Life at my grandparents' house revolved around the kitchen, where the most basic necessities of life were always present, where life itself happened. The book belonged to the basic stuff of life.

On Saturday or sometimes Sunday mornings (especially when, because of old age, my grandparents were not able to make it to church), my grandmother would walk over to the cabinet, take out the heavy tome, and solemnly take a seat at the head of the table. Only a loaf of bread was handled with similar care: you made the sign of the cross on it with your thumb to thank God for His daily provision before you sliced it. The family, and whoever else was present, would already be seated. We watched my grandmother attentively, even though we all knew the ritual. I had been brought up to know that the book was special: it had been purchased by my grandmother's grandparents, and at that time its price was as much as a cow! Whatever else that sum meant, it clearly was a lot of money. A *lot* of money for mountain folk trying to make a living from their meager land.

What was the book? Well, it was not the Bible. The Bible and the hymnals, both Polish and Slovak, had their place in the living room. This book bore the rather ponderous title, typical of the time when it was first published in the seventeenth century, *Sermons, or Expositions of the Holy Gospels [as those are] Orderly Appointed for the Sundays throughout the Year. Gathered from Holy Scripture and the Doctors of the Church, according to the ancient teaching and order of the true Christian Church, to the honor and glory of the Mighty God and the Savior Jesus Christ. By the Reverend Samuel Dambrowski, shepherd of the Evangelical Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, etc.*¹ It was a Lutheran postil: a collection of sermons covering all the Sundays, feasts, festivals, and saints' days of the year. Later on, to my surprise, I found there was even a sermon for the feast of Corpus Christi and another for the feast of St. Barbara (a saint, as we now know, who was very much

fictitious), and also one for the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Each sermon was preceded by the text of the Gospel lesson given according to the lectionary, of which the sermon was an exposition. In the earliest edition, a woodcut accompanied the Gospel narrative.

Once my grandmother was seated, she would lead what in effect was a house service or extended devotion, centered on the Gospel lesson and its sermonic proclamation. She would hold the postil with great solemnity and read the sermon to great dramatic effect. A picture of Luther was used as a bookmark. There were prayers and sometimes also a hymn. Hymns, especially the much-loved ones, were generally known by heart. Not only "A Mighty Fortress" with its four stanzas but also a favorite from the nineteenth century: "The paternal home is a veritable paradise, a gift of the Heavenly Father; were you to travel far and wide, more beautiful is none other."²

House services at my grandparents' belong to my most cherished childhood memories. The image of my grandmother (never my grandfather) with the Dambrowski postil is the first picture that comes to mind when I think of my own journey of faith. Now, as a Christian, as a thinker, a lot of the time an over-thinker, I do of course reflect on my own journey of faith. Much of this reflection belongs to prayer. Not all of it is as idyllic as the image I have just depicted. Much of it is deeply personal, intimate, and for this reason has the character of a confession. So let me confess something else before I go on. I do not even remotely have Augustine's persistence, insight, eloquence, or talent for self-reflection—a talent for giving an account of oneself in which every moment of delight and every moment of excruciating self-confrontation point unambiguously beyond themselves to God's pursuit of the sinner, to God's goodness, to God's promised rest. As a Christian, I do *reflect* on my faith journey. How could I not? But as a Lutheran Christian, I also worry (and this is just one of my worries) about the ease with which even a well-intentioned narrative of one's faith journey can get all wrapped up in the self; caught in a raptured, nostalgic, and even voyeuristic thrall to the self.

Especially when these narratives are told in a worship

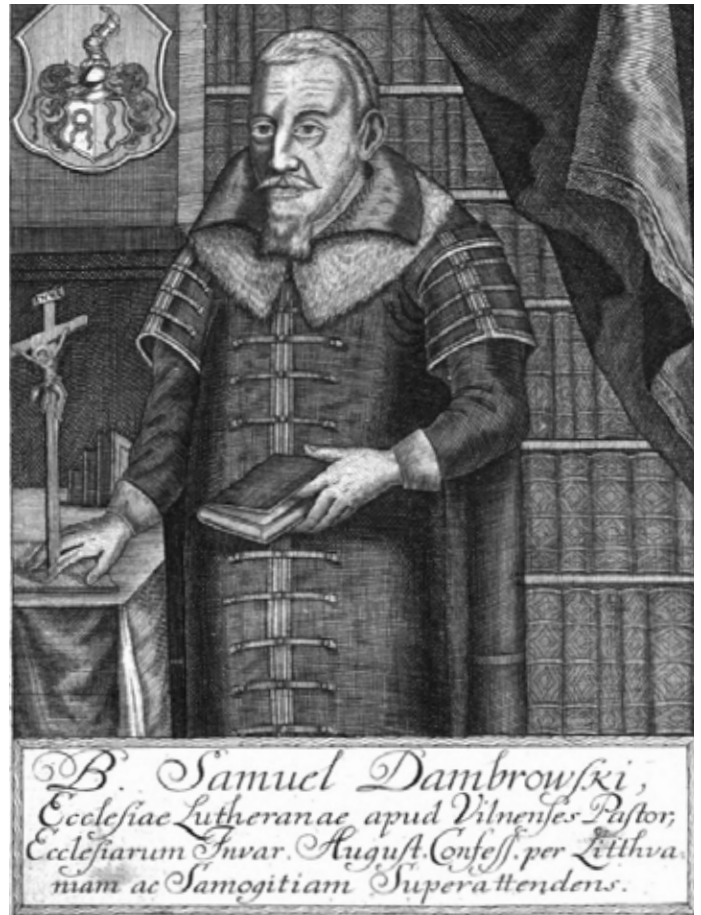
context, I worry that God’s work *may* turn into a pretext for a well-told story that has it all: love and betrayal, sex and jealousy, money and drugs, beautiful women, powers and dominions—as if the great scriptural arc of salvation didn’t already have most of these in the first place! As a Lutheran Christian, my clear preference, rather than to preach about myself, is to proclaim God’s work where it took place *decisively*—at the cross. My preference is to announce God’s work where it now still takes place *unambiguously*—in the midst of the worshipping assembly. My preference is to point to God where He promises always to be without fail, where He offers himself to us. This is my Lutheran instinct: I know nothing but Christ and him crucified!¹³

Christ crucified, certainly! Yet it is *I* who know him. It is *I* who have come to know him. Can my story be told, too? I believe it very much can. But since telling the story, as opposed to merely reflecting on the story, is a new genre to me, I cannot do it without simultaneously reflecting on what the story is and how it is being told. My goal here, in other words, is to present you with certain biographical images (to speak as a Christian) and to offer a running commentary (to speak to those images also as a theologian). This goal will lead me to consider testimony under three rubrics: proclamation, community, and history.

II. Proclamation

Let me begin with proclamation. As I reminisced about the devotional services at my grandparents’ place, I was struck by how quickly the center of that image shifted from the kitchen, the table, my grandmother at the table’s head—to the word. The word understood with utmost specificity: we didn’t gather simply to talk about the Scriptures, we didn’t just study the Scriptures to get a better grasp of the text. Scripture wasn’t *just* being explicated, expounded, and explained so that we might all go away richer in knowledge, intellectually stimulated, and morally encouraged, each of us sent away with a gobbet to chew on for the next couple of days. No, the word was being proclaimed. And what that meant in the first place was that this house service was a time of rest. We were at rest, and something was being done to us. A Gospel narrative was read, and then in the words of the sermon, through the mouth of my grandmother, the word repeatedly announced itself, saying: “All this is for you! All this for you!”

What still strikes me in that image even after all these years is the overwhelming sense of peace. The kitchen—the kitchen!—seemed no longer a welter of activity and the busy hub of farm life. We were no longer in martial-law Poland (1981–1983). Something was taking place in our very hearing. God was speaking His “Let there be!” and His “Amen!” When I think back to this image, very much part of *my* story, I realize now that much more took place on those weekend days than God speaking His story within my own. For as God did so, as God spoke His story,



Frontispiece from Dambrowski’s *Postil*

a reversal became transparent: my story was recognizably included in God’s story! God’s story wasn’t just an incident within mine, something I got to hear about every now and then. It was rather my story that belonged to the story of God’s faithfulness; my story belonged within the story of divine grace and mercy.

A Christian, theologically speaking, does not really have a story of his or her own—at least not in the conventional sense. For God has looked upon my story and understood it better than I could ever understand it myself: “O Lord, thou hast searched me out and known me, Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thoughts long before” (Psalm 139). And God has relieved me of the burden, even tyranny, of my past: God Himself has assumed responsibility for my story’s missteps, loose ends, dead ends, twisted plotlines, and unresolved conflicts, its vain dramas and needless sensationalism. When God said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), it was also my story that came to an end upon that hill. And now it is God Who tells my story, and as He tells it to me, so it is: “God has set my feet upon the rock, and ordered my goings” (Psalm 40). “[Thou, O Lord, shalt] lead me forth beside the waters of comfort... Thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Psalm 23). What then is a Christian’s story but a proclamation of the work of God?

We can see this transition from story-as-burden to story-

as-proclamation, from my story to God's story, in Luther's own autobiographical account, which he wrote down a year or so before his death.⁴ Reflecting on his Reformation breakthrough, Luther begins the whole narrative as very much his story: "I lived as a monk without reproach." Now, there's very little sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll here; there is rather more floor-scrubbing, earnest study, and soul-searching. But it is very much Luther's story. And for this reason, as we suddenly become aware, the story's trajectory is by no means a given. Actually, the story is about to run into the ground under its own weight, like a television series that falls prey to overconfidence in its own meandering plot. There is no doubt what the critical reception will be: thumbs down! This leads Luther to confess: "I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners." "I was angry with God," he bursts out; God, the seemingly never-satisfied critic and judge!

And then suddenly we come upon the words, "At last, by the mercy of God..." What Luther came to understand while wrestling with Paul's Epistle to the Romans is that divine righteousness is an attribute that God communicates, bestows, and makes into His gift. "Here," Luther says, "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates!" And having said that, Luther now goes on to proclaim "the work of God; that is, what God does in us; the power of God, with which He makes us strong; the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God." In other words, though Luther began with a story of his own, he now proclaims the story of God, which God shares with us, the only story that can see our story through to a happy, ripe, and glorious conclusion.

III. Community

My story, then, belongs within the story of God's faithfulness. This

observation points to another aspect of Christian testimony: it proclaims, but proclamation does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, where proclamation happens, a community also forms as the gathering of those called into God's peace.

When I think back to the house services in my grandparents' home, I see not only the immediate family and the occasional friend seated in the kitchen. The postil, the book that had once cost a cow, handed down from generation to generation, was itself testimony that God's faithfulness transcends the confines of the kitchen: in space, to be sure, but also in time. My grandparents did buy religious books. But the most important books, the Bible, the hymnal, and the Dambrowski postil had been in the family for several generations. They were used often, and each use was, as it were, a glimpse into the church triumphant. The faithful departed were implicitly recognized as those who had passed on the faith and now rested in the final victory of God. If God had seen them through their race, then we too could be assured of the outcome of our pilgrimage. And what a race *they* had had to run!

The first edition of the Dambrowski postil came out in 1620, and it was followed by many others. It gradually became the beloved book of Polish-speaking Lutherans in Silesia, and by the early 1900s almost every household owned a copy, even though the books were prohibitively expensive. In the course of more than three hundred years, the postil contributed decisively to the preservation of the people's faith, and coincidentally also to the preservation of the Polish language: all this in an environment that not only was rather hostile to Lutheranism, but where the powers-that-be also demonstrated a clear and forceful preference for the German tongue.

To give a better perspective here, we need to go for a moment as far back as the Reformation itself. The dukes of Cieszyn (the area where I come from) converted to the Wittenberg theology in the middle of the sixteenth century.

As the rulers converted, so did their subjects, and by the late 1500s the entire duchy was Lutheran. Lutheranism became the confession even of the peasant folk living in remote hamlets in the mountain valleys. But tragedy struck in less than a century: in 1653 the ducal line became extinct. The duchy then passed into the hands of the Austrian Hapsburgs. As staunch Catholics, the Hapsburg rulers mandated that the entire population convert back to Roman Catholicism. The Lutherans lost all their churches. Lutheran worship was banned. Pastors were expelled. It took sixty years for the Hapsburg emperors to permit, grudgingly, the construction of one non-Catholic church in the entire territory, provided it was outside the town center, had no steeple, and its entrance did not face the street.⁵ Another century and a half was needed before Lutherans were granted confessional equality.

The memory of the persecution, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, remains very much alive to this day. In my hometown of Ustroń, there is still a place in the woods close to the top of one of the mountains, Mount Równica, that is remembered as the location of secret Lutheran services in the seventeenth century. The spot is marked by a rock with a book and a chalice carved in it, along with the words of God to Moses, "Remove your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). In the remote past, news probably traveled by word of mouth and in deepest secrecy that an itinerant pastor was coming and a service would be held "at the stone" (as people referred to the place). I picture a group of men and women huddled together under the rustling canopy of beech trees, the men sheltering their wives and children from the cold mountain wind. All of them serious-faced, determined, with many faces furrowed by the hardships of life, yet all somehow joyful and profoundly grateful. I picture them listening attentively. I picture them with their heads

bowed down in prayer. Then the bread and cup would be passed around. Probably no baptisms: in those days, infants were likely to be baptized by their fathers or the midwives; life was too precarious and child mortality too high to risk the uncertainty of a long wait for a pastor.

We can look at this image both as a cherished memory and an underlying historical reality. Either way, what it emphasizes is the community of faith in space and time. These are not just disparate believers, cherishing their faith in the depths of their hearts. Nor is this meeting simply a community of resistance or of human solidarity in the face of oppression. No, it is rather a community that recognizes that the gospel is more than a message. The gospel is the risen Lord at work among his people: through the mouth of the preacher who points to the cross; who by God's command speaks the absolution; who consigns the past to the past and opens up God's future. The gospel is the risen Lord touching through the water, burying and raising, birthing a people for himself. The gospel is the risen Lord, offering his body to eat and his blood to drink. God at work, still at work!

When I think of my forebears, the community gathered at the stone, I am struck by their profound insight, or instinct, rather. Faith, however strongly it believes, however fierce its commitment, however uncompromising its stance, does not live by itself; it cannot live by itself. Faith does not look to itself. Faith does not build on itself. Rather, faith is only that which grasps, clings to another. Faith lays hold of another and this other's strength.

The apostle Peter understood only some of this truth at first (Matthew 14:22–33). He understood that it is God Who draws out faith. God alone commands that one step out of the boat and enables one to do so. God's promise, implicit in God's call, is what makes the impossible possible. It makes possible trust against all odds. What Peter did not yet understand is that faith is not a thing unto itself. For

when the strong wind comes, when fears rise, faith, mere faith, will seem weak, all too human, easily overwhelmed. Faith has no strength of its own. And it won't find such strength by rummaging for a memory of its former intensity, a memory of greater and easier days. No! Faith must be taken out of itself, out of its precarious confidence in itself. It must cling to Christ and to his strength. It must cling not to the God it remembers, God within faith, but to God as He calls and works outside faith and for the sake of faith. God at work, still at work—now—in the places where He promises we can find Him.

The Silesian Christians, who braved the wind for over sixty years and the more metaphorical tempests of life, understood what Peter did not understand. Up in the mountains, secretly gathered at a place marked by a rock, they sought the nourishment of their faith in the work of God on their behalf. There, with God in their midst, calling, touching, and feeding, they became a people of God. They became God's church.

IV. History

Testimony, as we have seen, is ultimately proclamatory. And proclamation brings with itself not just an individual story but the story of the community of faith: many stories embedded in God's story. To the community of faith belong not only those presently gathered but also the entire cloud of witnesses who also once proclaimed and passed on the faith. The church's historical dimension is inescapable: it stretches as far back as God's own faithfulness. That historical connection, like my grandmother's postil, like the rock on Mount Równica, can sometimes be very tangible. But what does this history mean for us as individual Christians and as communities? Specifically, what does history mean for us who are telling our stories within it? This is the third and final aspect of testimony that I would like to reflect on.

Faith, as I have said, does not look

for God in its own memory, hankering after the spiritual elation of the past and desperately trying to conjure up its spirit. Faith does not simply grasp God within itself, but it always grasps God outside of itself, where God is at work, still at work for us. If this were not true, Christian churches would be little more than societies of mutual admiration. Now, what applies to the believer applies to the community itself. The community is not to be self-referential, any more than is the individual believer. One of the great temptations that God's people face is to dwell on the faith of the ancestors and to try and kindle its spirit, its zeal, its very motions in ourselves. If they had it, why can't we? What happens as a result is a dehistoricization of history: history loses its historical aspect. It now becomes a law for us, the ideal of which we fall short and to which we must live up. Instead of history, we get nostalgic moralism.

But the cost is even higher, and God pays the price. When history is history, it belongs to God, Who is the God of history. When history is history, it tells the story of God's work in the lives of many. When history is history, it tells the story of God's faithfulness: of servants sent time and again to a rebellious vineyard (Matthew 21:33–46); of God's Son killed like a common criminal and raised from the dead by the Father. It tells of powers and dominions conquered, of lives transfigured by grace, of courage trusting in God's help, of God speaking through human mouths, distributing the benefits of the cross in the most unlikely places. History tells of God's faithfulness from generation to generation. The very existence and persistence of the community attests to this faithfulness of God. The community must recognize it, but the community dare not live from this history. If it tries to do so, its own past will tyrannize it. It will be stuck within itself, delivered to its own judgment upon itself, navel-gazing with no way out, God's work long brushed aside by the community's quest for itself.

What we must all remember is that we do not, in the end, stand on the shoulders of giants. Not at all! We stand by the faithfulness and mercy of our God, new to us every morning. The great cloud of witnesses in the Epistle to the Hebrews is only that: a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11:1–12:2). The witnesses are not models to imitate; their lives are very much their own. But they all alike testify to the ongoing work of God, to God's provision, to God's grace. Their lives are not held up before us so that we might hijack them for the purposes of our own soul-searching and self-improvement. They are presented to us to highlight God's involvement in history, His lordship over it, His judicial "No!" to it, and His resounding "Yes!" to His people. For if God was with them, how can He not be with us?

Awareness of history is crucial to testimony. When history is history, it tells of God's grace. But when history is reduced to example, it is always judgment: the present is now made to bear the burden of past events to live down or to live up to. To testify is to proclaim the work of God as historical, as ongoing. The Almighty showed mercy to those who fear Him from generation to generation; and now He has also done great things for me (cf. Luke 1:49–50). To testify is therefore not to fit into a genre, to try to find your own story in someone else's. Abram under the starry sky, Saul blinded on a dusty road, Augustine the refined sex addict, Luther the pious God-hater: they all tell their stories in a way that reverberates through history. But there are countless Christians whose quiet lives, whose daily struggles, whose weaknesses forgiven, whose sins pardoned, whose earnest seeking for God's face tell this story just as well and just as eloquently. When told well, the story does not rest on conformity to a biographical genre with a requisite con-

coction of dramatic ingredients. It does not represent a sort of tragedy with a silver lining intended to elicit a cathartic reaction from the audience. Rather, when the story is told well, it is the announcement that God is still at work, even among us, even at the eleventh hour. God is still at work, calling us to walk on the water and saying "Trust Me!" This is a story of grace upon grace.

I remember Saturday mornings when I was seven and eight years old. I had to walk to church for religious instruction just as a cartoon version of Don Quixote was playing on television. And I was annoyed. I remember my great-grandmother teaching me prayers, and I remember the joy of being able to repeat the words after her. I remember my mother reading me Bible stories in the evening. I remember the painting of the Last Supper above the altar in our church, the creases in the white tablecloth rendered with perfection, and Jesus seated in the midst of the disciples. Ever since I could remember, I was surrounded by saints, younger and older, who in the rather bleak reality of Communist Poland believed with quiet persistence. And I remember one more thing: I remember becoming aware that Jesus Christ was not just their God but also mine. My Lord and my God! In the core of my being; mine, because He had first claimed me. I was awakening to the fact that the word spoken over me in baptism years before was indeed God's promise *to me*, and that God had actually long since made good on it. And I remember peace. The rest is history. And because it is history, it has forgiveness, lots of forgiveness; and mercies, mercies new *every* morning. But I won't bore you with the details.

v. A Final Word

This essay has been both a testimony, or at least some autobiographical

glimpses, and a Lutheran reflection on what it means to testify. If I have left you with too little drama, too few narrow escapes, it is by design. When I tried to tell about myself, I realized this narrative was a story about Christ proclaimed right from the get-go. I realized further that the story makes no sense without the faithful community of which I was a part. And I realized that the very presence of the community testified to the ongoing work of God, faithfully distributing His gifts again and again from generation to generation. If I'm leaving you unsatisfied, I have good news for you. The story isn't over yet! For God is still at work, and He will see it through to the appointed end! His will be the final Amen! And I praise God that we are now in this story together. *LF*

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Notes

1. Samuel Dambrowski, *Kazania albo wykłady porzadne...* (Toruń, 1620), followed by some fifteen editions, the last in 1896.
2. "Ojcowski Dom, to istny raj," written by the Silesian poet Jan Kubisz (1848–1929).
3. Compare I Corinthians 2:2 and II Corinthians 10:5.
4. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings" (1545), *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 34:336.
5. This was the Jesus Church (Kościół Jezusowy) in the town of Cieszyn. Its construction began in 1709 on the basis of the Treaty of Altranstädt (1707) between the King of Sweden, Charles XII, and the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph I.

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over a hundred little ones, each with its benefactor, each with its patron saint, each tiny table lovingly adorned with candles and swaddled by masses and prayers. It was a public place as well: a refuge from the driving rain, a beggar's stoop, a merchant's meeting room. The inside was filled with booths and sometimes the warm and pungent smell of animals.

If the inside was a harbor for the faithful, the façade was a message to the world proclaiming Strasbourg's greatness. The three gaping portals are positively toothy with statues. On the left, Christ is born and the virtues stand victorious over the vices. In the center, flanked by his apostles, Christ is crucified; surrounding them the Bible's greatest hits roll out on tiered archivolt. On the right Christ stands in judgment as his angels blow their trumpets, tombs are emptied, the foolish virgins weep, and the wise ones stand smugly by.

Above this Scripture carved in stone a great rose window blooms, streaming out in white and blue and yellow—pure aesthetic pleasure without figures or faces. Perched high above and to the side, mounted upon chargers in their niches, stand epic statues of the city's patron kings: Clovis, Dagobert, and Rudolph of Habsburg. Each year at *Schwörtag*, swearing-in day, the burghers took their oath of civic loyalty before God and these His earthly deputies.

When finally in 1439 its spire topped out at 466 feet, Our Lady of Strasbourg was the tallest building in Europe. What simpler metaphor for greatness than height? In all the world only the pyramids of Egypt surpassed it, and only by a few feet. Rival steeples destroyed Strasbourg's record until lightning destroyed *them*. Our Lady crowned Europe again for over two hundred years, until Ulm and Cologne finally seized first and second place late in the nineteenth century.

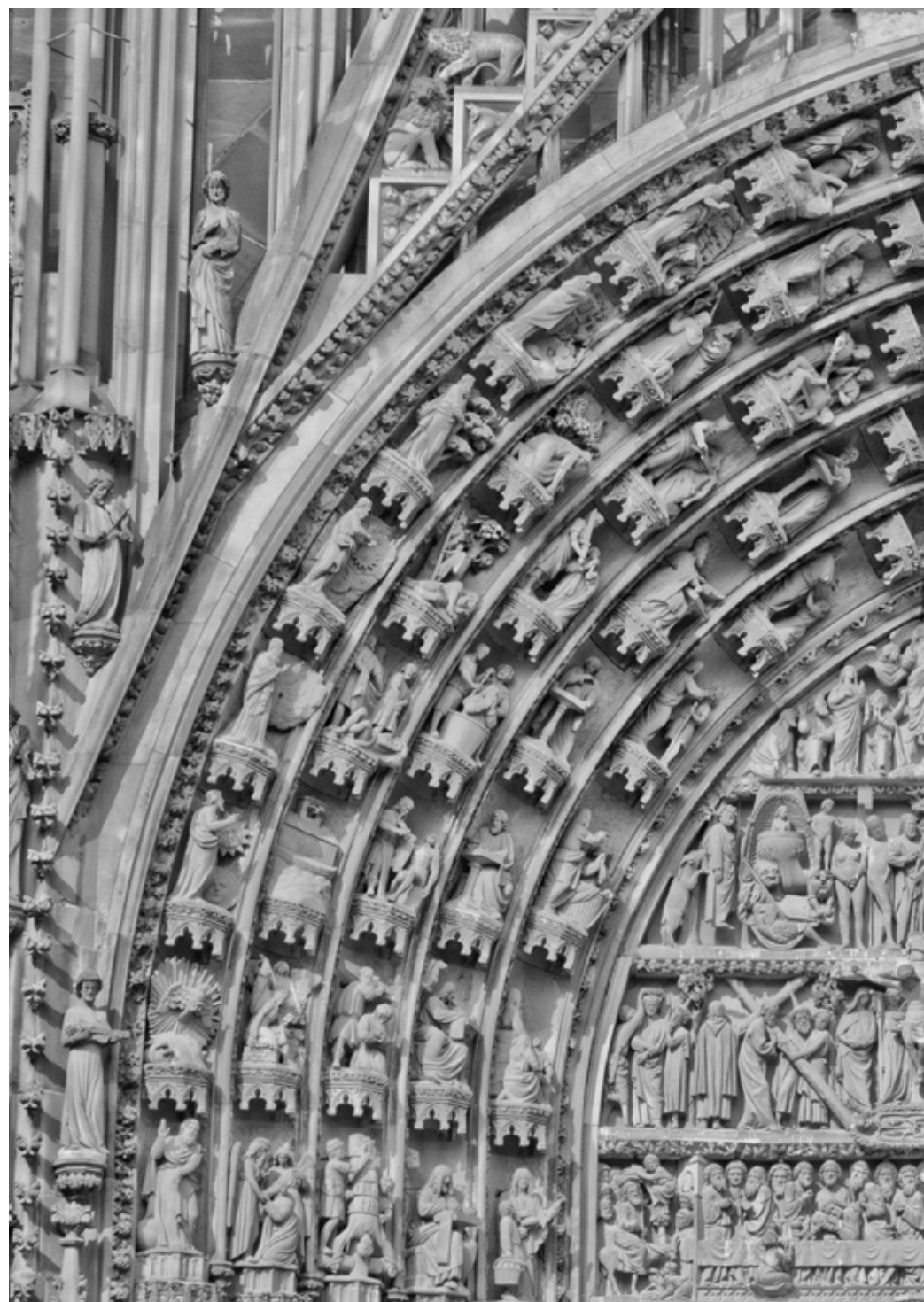
They'd built the building to proclaim the glory of God, but in time the

stones ceased to cry out with the same insistence. So the burghers called in a preacher, an impassioned orator, Johann Geiler (1445–1510) from nearby Kaysersberg. He preached in the cathedral's St. Lawrence chapel until the crowds, eager to hear their very own Jeremiah bawl his exposés of priestly debauchery and lay laxity, grew too large. The city built a

proper pulpit in the nave, a jewel of Gothic miniature, ringed with the requisite evangelists and apostles, tiny niches lurking with orthodox bishops. The heavens, too, were put to work for the sake of this evangel: at solar noon on the equinoxes, a greenish ray strikes the pulpit's cross—an event still announced in the local papers.

Partly due to Geiler's groundwork,

Christ's passion, surrounded by stories from the Bible and beyond, on the central portal.



the Reformation won Strasbourg over in 1524. Though most of the cathedral's decoration was spared the iconoclasm that ravaged churches elsewhere, the reformers purged the space to fit their new confession. The remaining side altars were suppressed, along with the mass; prominent statues of St. Christopher and the Virgin were moved to less offensive locales. In Geiler's place now preached Bucer, Capito, Oecolampadius, Zell, maybe

even Calvin once or twice. But much continued as before. Catholics were allowed to worship in the choir—Strasbourg has a long tradition of confessionally partitioned and shared church buildings—and a Protestantly reorganized Oeuvre Notre Dame continued to maintain the building.

And added to it, too. The broken medieval clockwork was replaced with a new mechanical marvel. On each quarter hour, struck by an angel,

the four seasons of life march before Death. At local noon, Death sounds his bell twelve times; then, above, the twelve apostles promenade, turning to face a blessing Christ. At Peter's passage, a cock begins to crow. Beneath this allegorical dance an "ecclesiastical computer" calculates festivals and days, the sun and planets circle in their spheres, eclipses are presaged. Nothing, not even time, escaped the jurisdiction of this church.

For one hundred fifty years the edifice was Lutheran. In 1681 Louis XIV took Strasbourg for France and the cathedral for his confession. The reinstated Catholics returned the displaced art and installed a new high altar conforming to the rubrics of the Council of Trent. Later, a laureled King Louis upon his battle stallion was installed opposite Clovis on the façade.

It was the French Revolution that left the most destructive wake. In 1792 the Jacobins took out their rage by smashing two hundred and thirty-five statues. They evicted the Baroque high altar and in its place erected a stylized mountain topped with a figure of many-breasted Nature. The cathedral was repurposed as a Temple to Reason. The cooler heads of the town council managed to stave off the threatened hewing of the cathedral's spire—its single elevated spire, lacking its double, was judged by certain revolutionary officials to be an offense to *égalité*—by offering to cover it with a gigantic Phrygian cap. For several years the steeple's cross hid beneath a sheet-metal tuque painted an appropriate revolutionary red.

Catholic worship was restored in 1798, but the building remained state property (and does to this day). Its height made it a natural site for France's first optical telegraph, which for fifty years transported messages through the air from Paris to points east. While thurifers inside raised their messages to God on clouds of billowing incense, operators above yanked their pullies, shifting the semaphore's black and white arms, sending mes-



sages of doom for regions soon to be razed by Napoleon's roaming armies.

Iconoclasts and Jacobins did spotty work at best. But nature never ceases her attacks. Lightning was the cathedral's most constant and dramatic scourge—a preaching point, for sure. More than once storms knocked the topmost spire askew. The freakish squall of 1568 sent lightning skittering across the leaden roof, setting off a flood of molten metal that splashed onto the pavement below before stopping up the mouths of several peptic gargoyles. In 1624 a bull's-eye bolt blew the spire to smithereens, asperging bits of sandstone cross over a radius of five hundred feet.

The most urgent menace crept up from below. In 1903 acting lead architect (for a proper cathedral always has one on staff) Johann Knauth noticed fissures in a critical pillar, the one sup-

porting the southeast corner of the spire, evidently the victim of rotting piles far beneath. For years to come, even through the First World War, men of Strasbourg braced and jacked and dug and poured concrete to reinforce the crumbling pier and save the spire from tumbling down.

Even without this drama, the weather chips away at the stone relentlessly, the wind rounds off the statues, rain erodes the delicate tracery. Crockets crack and flutes crumble. A steady staff of masons and sculptors are constantly cleaning or restoring bits of something, working up new vaults or statues to replace the crumbling old ones, which are often auctioned off to pay for the new. Who knows how much of what we see is original. The Oeuvre still has its properties, its rents, its annual income. And it must, for keeping a cathedral upright is a never-ending task.

Our culture is obsessed with penultimate goals. Against this stands the cathedral of Strasbourg—along with those of other cities—whose geological origins and celestial orientation demand from us a much, much longer term. It shows us, too, how a beloved object can invite the efforts of many lives, of many epochs, and somehow be faithful to them all. America's energies flow generously into other things—mobile phones and feature films, biotech cures and SUVs. It would be futile to lament it. But contemplating the architectural outgrowth, the embodied creative energy of a single city, I wonder what we might create were our minds similarly steered.

Each night throughout this summer's millennial festivities for the cathedral, digital projectors beamed a postmodern fantasia upon its façade and southern flank: earthquakes trembled, dragons flapped, flowers

One thousand years after its foundation, Strasbourg's cathedral still dominates the city skyline and the surrounding Rhine valley.



bloomed, and rockets launched across its expanse while frozen statues took vivid color and angels took to flight (front cover). The building is not dead or relegated to the pathetic status of “heritage.” It continues to speak, to be adapted to new forms.

The barges of today have more and greater human signs to see—dams, locks, bridges, whizzing wonders of machinery zipping by above and humming below. The Rhine itself is not the river it once was: now it’s straight and narrow, diked and tamed by human hands. But in and around the din of highways, airports, train stations, and high-rises, the cathedral remains, standing tall and delicate, stately, airy, unmoved, and very beloved. If it’s a window on the past, it’s also open to the future. A thousand years from now, little else here today is likely to be standing. *LF*

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The thousandth anniversary of the cathedral has prompted a spate of new books on the topic, but the classic work, used as a reference in this article, is the enormous *La Grâce d’une Cathédrale: Strasbourg*, ed. Joseph Doré, rev. ed. (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2010).

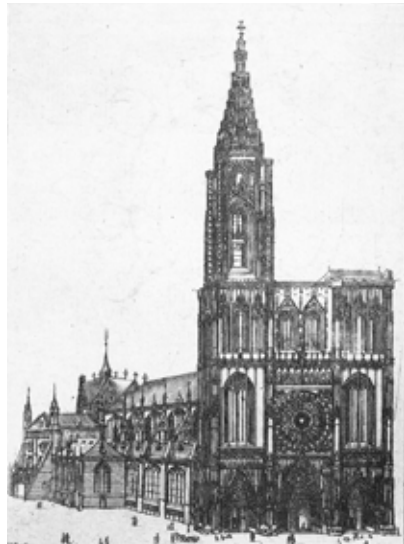


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ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF CATHOLICS, LUTHERANS, AND REVOLUTIONARIES IN STRASBOURG'S CATHEDRAL

Andrew L. Wilson



Floating down the Rhine from Basel, a medieval barge-man would have seen few monuments of any size. Fishermen and ferries would ply their trade; smoke would rise from forest huts. At Briesach he could admire the grand St. Stephan's church upon the hill, skirted by that fortress city's walls. Some vineyards and some fields would show on distant slopes. But mostly he would float, the dark line of the Black Forest rising to the east, the Vosges Mountains its mirror image to the west.

Nearing Strasbourg he would spy a different sight, something angular and unnatural, a dusky smudge erupting up from the plain, the only sign of the great city teeming below. And at last, off the Rhine and through the tollhouse of the river Ill, he would raise his eyes and see that spindly mass of heaven-piercing height, the Cathedral of Our Lady.

A thousand years ago, in 1015, the first foundation stone was laid for Strasbourg's cathedral. It started as a bishop's project, an alliance between Werner Habsburg and his good friend Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor. The two together placed the cornerstone from which would rise a great monument to God and a sign of their prestige. Unlike modern minds—who might have searched for proper bedrock—they built upon the site where Christ's name was first honored in

Strasbourg. The quaggy soil required the driving of thousands of piles to support the church's weight—moist roots, if you will, for the almost animate mass soon to grow above.

Over the course of the eleventh century, a sturdy Romanesque basilica of Euclidean perfection grew, all arcs and pillars and barrel vaults, set in golden means. The transept was octagonal—a reminder of the resurrection, and of Charlemagne's basilica in Aachen. Subtle beasts and peering faces stared from its historiated capitals, tiny heralds calling mortals to contemplate eternity amidst the resounding harmonies of the spheres. Until it caught fire four times and finally toppled, frail and perishable after all.

Rebuilding commenced at once. The choir and half a transept were built again in Romanesque. But then another style took over: the nave and the rest soared upward in dazzling, unruly Gothic. Set against the restrained Romanesque, the Gothic comes off as all nob and crockets, finials and pinnacles, writhing beasts and beastly gargoyles. By some transcendent feat, an architectural transubstantiation, the Gothic mind managed to spin tons and tons of pinkish sandstone into a gossamer veil across the heavens. The nave was built in a single push: just forty years to make the buttresses fly.

By the late 1200s the bishop's power waned; the city's waxed. The burghers now took the reigns of the building plan. To pay the workers they consolidated farms—bequests from the faithful, bits of forest, other buildings and their rents. They channeled piously purchased indulgences into the coffers of an independent foundation, the Oeuvre Notre Dame, still in existence all these centuries later.

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Fed by this fertile stream of revenue, the building grew yet grander. New architects were hired, and masons, too. New quarries were opened. From field, from grove, from mine, the cathedral added yearly to its splendor and its height. Light that refracted

through great expanses of tinted, glittering glass told tales of God's providence. The northern wall of windows was populated by potentates—Charlemagne, Charles Martel, Pepin the Short, Louis the Debonair, Conrad, Philip, Frederick—emperors all, bearers of the Roman orb, safeguards of Christendom. The southern windows depict Bible tales in gruesome verisimilitude. The entire building broadcasts scenes and images from the world above, seen through the glass dimly.

This was a church for the people. There was no high altar to begin with; ringed round the aisles stood well

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