Oral Performance of Biblical Texts in the Early Church

Publishing Authority: The Text of the Book of Concord
A Bibliography of the 1580 Dresden Concordia
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On the cover: Detail of word cloud of the Augsburg Confession (Triglotta translation) created by Travis Scholl at http://www.wordle.net/show/wrdl/4227180/Augsburg_Confession.

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Norma normans and norma normata. Norming norm and normed norm. The distinction is as old as Lutherans are, even older.

And even though this issue of Concordia Journal doesn’t explicitly discuss the distinction, it is flitting between the lines.

Sacred scripture is, of course, the norma normans. David Trobisch takes up a discussion (literally) of the Bible as the site of oral performance, and all the ways that the telling of the story of scripture is enlivened by our speaking of its words—out loud, in community, for all to hear.

The Book of Concord is, for Lutherans of course, the norma normata. So Robert Kolb and Thomas Von Hagel write about its writing. Or more accurately, Kolb writes about the history of the book’s 1580 edition(s) and, thus, the implications for theologizing through its normative authority. And, to explicate this fact, Von Hagel details this history with a significant bibliography of the 1580 Dresden edition’s publication throughout Europe.

Words of the Word, words about words…it may sound academic, but the implications range wide. Hence, Erik Hermann’s discussion of the word diakonia, the first in a series of three theological observers from various faculty members on the presidential theme of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Witness–Mercy–Life Together (martyria–diakonia–koinonia). As well, Eric Andrae’s substantive review of Bonhoeffer Works, which is near completion.

And while we speak of the Word, I will mention the new preaching resource at ConcordiaTheology.org, called the “Pulpit.” Here we gather together an incredible array of resources for preaching, including the mind-blowing Lectionary at Lunch+. Lectionary at Lunch+ is a one-stop shop for everything a preacher needs to preach the Word, organized by a calendar and search function so easy to use Geico might make a commercial about it. See it for yourself. I dare you to find a better preaching resource on the Web.

The Concordia Seminary faculty has also just released its first Advent sermon series. “Savior of the Nations, Come” is an Advent-Christmas series based on Isaiah 40, written by biblical scholar and preacher Reed Lessing. You can download it at Concordia Seminary’s new online store: store.csl.edu.

All these good words of the Word. As people of the Book, and people of the Book of Concord, what can be better than to read our way to the coming again of the Word incarnate?

Travis J. Scholl
Managing Editor of Theological Publications
As never before in our lifetimes, seminaries have to justify their existence. Challenging questions come from all sides, many driven by the duress of our times. How can we justify the rising costs of higher education in general, let alone put money into that special niche of higher education, seminaries? Just as government subsidies to public universities have declined sharply, many denominational seminaries have seen similar declines in subsidy from their church bodies. What’s the return on that investment to church and society if seminary scholars are secluded in ivory towers, and seminaries are not hands-on helping seminarians to go into churches and communities as servant leaders? Can’t we dispense with traditional seminary campuses in favor of distance learning? Lurking over all the specific questions about the value of seminaries is the fact of today’s American culture. Call it “postmodern,” “post-church,” or whatever you will, we’re living in a time that doubts truth and is skeptical of institutions. It’s post-church America; mainline churches are almost all in decline, and so today, like it or not, we have to justify our existence. The question is specifically pertinent to us as a faculty: What good, if any, is our scholarship to pastors and people in the field?

This year is the 400th anniversary of the King James translation. The Preface to the KJV says, “Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light.” Translation, whether of words from one language to another or making concepts understandable from one context into another, is the work of scholars. The history of King James suggests some thoughts about seminary scholarship today. Mary, Queen of Scots, was put to death and her 13-month-old son was crowned James VI of Scotland. The regents provided a Scottish humanist and continental scholar, Protestant George Buchanan, who gave young James a thorough and excellent education in the classics, Bible, and statecraft. This James, James VI of Scotland, became James I of England when Elizabeth I named him her successor. Elizabeth died in 1603. As James was riding to England to assume the crown, a delegation of Puritans stopped him and presented the “Millennial Petition,” a petition signed by 1,000 dissenters about alleged abuses in the young Church of England. On October 24, 1603 he called for a meeting to deal with those religious issues. They met at the Hampton Court Palace on three non-consecutive days in January 1604.

At this meeting, James the savvy scholar did at least two things. First, he let the churchmen and scholars know that he was in charge. Second, because of his scholarly training he didn’t take everything the churchmen and scholars said at face value. I think that those two things about James are critically important to us as scholars of the church. Because James was a scholarly person with his hands on the levers of power, he could direct the work of scholars to practical purposes, good practical purposes. That’s what happened at the Hampton Court Conference. A leader of the Puritans,
John Reynolds, the President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, made an unplanned suggestion for a new translation of the Bible. An unexpected opportunity! James was not happy with the two dominant English translations, the Bishops Bible of the Church of England (because of poor translations) and the Geneva Bible used by the Puritans (because of partisan textual notes). Both Bibles used scholarship for partisan purposes. James immediately saw that a new translation could bring together the feuding churchmen and be a vehicle for unity in his new, religiously divided realm. He ordered the new translation to begin immediately, that “this be done by the best learned in both Universities, after them to be reviewed by the Bishops, and the chief learned of the Church; from them to be presented to the Privy Council, and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority, and so this whole Church be bound unto it, and none other.”

James knew to seize the opportunity because George Bancroft had schooled him in both the theoretical and practical, learning the liberal arts but also debating the challenges James would face ruling the people. When we go into our classrooms, no small burden is upon us to teach our students to become at home with scholarship . . . not simply for scholarship’s sake but because they will need the fruits of scholarship when they lead congregations and ministries. That requires professors to have an eye on the world outside the classroom, to engage students in today’s issues. If our scholarship in the classroom is not engaged with the realities of the world today, our teaching will not make the generational impact we desire. You know the realities: Christianity growing in the global south, de-Europeanizing of American Christianity, aging populations all over the world, decline of literacy leading to an increasingly oral culture, disregard for institutions, lack of belief that there is absolute truth, and all-in-all postmodern, post-church America, whatever you choose to call it. Engagement happens through our distance/contextual programs which are by definition cross-cultural, but increasingly we’re giving residential students significant cross-cultural experiences. We need to instill in our students inquisitive scholarship that asks penetrating questions about today’s culture, and penetrating questions on how to engage today’s culture.

James was a scholar who also had the power to command scholars to translate for church and world. Who is our monarch today? James ruled over church and state. He could support scholars or he could banish them. Today our “monarch” is the many-tentacled thing we call “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” Because we are a closely-held denominational seminary in a declining denomination, at the end of the day it will be the pastors and people of the congregations who enable our hands-on scholarship or neglect us. You, the Concordia Seminary faculty, are going straight to pastors and congregations: Concordia Journal, www.ConcordiaTheology.org, iTunes U, the movie Walther, Concordia Seminary Press, Concordia Commentary series, other publishers, institutes, your conference presentations, international travel, guest speaking and preaching...on and on. When you work to be a “go-to” place for theological education and leadership, they will come. And they are.

The King James Bible was slow to catch on, it didn’t go “viral,” but when it did catch on the blessings were innumerable. There was a happy coming together of scholars with a unifying purpose and a political and economic fact, the king. On one hand,
scholarship needs favorable First Article conditions to thrive and be disseminated. For example, we can’t grant sabbaticals if we don’t have adequate financial and professorial capacity. On the other hand—the pragmatic side of seminary operations—those fiscal and administrative constraints that can make scholars bristle, need scholarship for insight and vision. The blessing of the King James Bible was a coming together of scholars on a mission and an enabling monarch, a happy marriage. I don’t want to overstate this, but I think Concordia Seminary is close to that. Your relevant scholarship coupled with the Seminary’s best financial outlook in years is united for the purpose of faithful forward movement of congregations and our denomination. We are in good shape financially for now, but our long-term financial future needs to be secured. We will strive to do this by building our endowments, by increasing resources for scholarship, by continuing to seek operating efficiencies, and by updating the physical plant. We’ve begun with the Benidt Seminary Center, and we will be tackling deferred maintenance each year for years to come. We learned painfully that the financial model followed for decades no longer works. We were headed toward the brink, and the Great Recession almost pushed us over. Today we are stable and will pursue our long-term fiscal viability. Our future can be a happy wedding of the scholarly and pragmatic, a unity for the future of the mission.

Seminary scholarship, both in and out of the classroom, will in time make a difference to today’s church and world. A residential faculty is the place ahead of all others within a denomination where theological vitality exists and is imparted to future leaders. This is especially so when the faculty’s scholarly research is done with awareness of the profound changes of postmodern, post-church America. Because the vast majority of people in the church do not have the time or the specialized training of seminary scholars, churches have historically seen the value of maintaining scholars in their midst. By our writing and presentations, we resource congregations and church workers who understandably cannot keep up with current thought on the many interactions of church and society. By our interactions with students in and out of classrooms, we equip future leaders to “interpret reality theologically,” as Martin Scharlemann put it, thinking on their feet more than aping pat answers that don’t fit today’s questions. By upholding the intellectual standards of academia, we maintain institutional credibility and give credibility to our graduates in the public square. The landscape of society and church has changed so dramatically in recent decades and is accelerating with such incomprehensible speed that penetrating, insightful theological analysis of today’s realities is needed by those who are supposed to move the mission forward but don’t have sufficient time for scholarship. Because “there is nothing new under the sun,” (Eccl 1:9), the value of a seminary faculty is to research the past to find guidance for today’s “new normal.” “Ask for the ancient paths,” (Jer 6:16).

Daniel Aleshire puts it this way:

Is the work that these schools do worth the price tag? If theological education is a commodity to be produced at the least expense for the most recipients, then the question is legitimate. If the goal, however, is the prep-
aration of religious leaders who are deeply formed in an understanding of faith, who can guide congregations in a culture that is less than convinced that religion is a cultural asset, who can lead in the context of significant change in congregational practice, and who both know the tradition and can teach it to the increasing percentage of people who do not know the tradition or understand it, then theological education is not a commodity. The question about cost is really a question about value. If seminaries fail in the future because of inadequate financing, it won’t be because there is not enough money available. It will be because there is an inadequate commitment to the essential contribution that theological schools make to the Christian project and religious leadership.

Dale A. Meyer
President

Endnotes

Correction—Summer 2011 (vol. 37, no. 3)

In an editing error, a citation on page 191 from a letter by C. F. W. Walther in Ken Schurb’s article “Was Walther Waltherian?” appeared within the main text, such that it looked like a paraphrase. Subsequently, the quotation was edited. The correct text follows:

…. Specifically, when Walther wrote a letter to J. A. Ottesen on December 29, 1858 he raised the question

whether such an arrangement might be encountered, when the preacher would concede it to the layman as a right now and then publicly to teach the people in his stead and publicly to lead them in prayer, and when this occurs regularly. This is so diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Office in Scripture (1 Cor. 12:28 [29]; Acts 6:4; Titus 1:5), to Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession, to all witnesses of pure doctrine, and to the constant practice of our church, that one cannot fathom how one who is otherwise fairly conversant with God’s Word and the orthodox church can be in uncertainty for a moment. To base such a matter on the spiritual priesthood of Christians is nonsense, for if that were the case, no one has reason to wait for the calling of a pastor. Even less can the matter depend on a special call; for the church cannot make a call according to its whim but can give only that which God has established and which He alone recognizes (by this alone is a servant of God made, not through a human contract for a few hours or days).4
Recently, the synodical office of the president offered up three areas of emphasis that give expression to much of the church’s work: Martyria, Diakonia, and Koinonia—Witness, Mercy, and Life Together. The second word, “diakonia” (ministry or service), is intended to designate the church’s work of care for the neighbor, especially the neighbor in need. The word “mercy” is not so much a translation of the Greek diakonia as it is a description of what kind of service is here meant. Having worked now with our deaconess program for several years, I have noted the prominence of the word “mercy” in describing the particular service that deaconesses render to and on behalf of the church. Placing this word as a central description of the church’s life and work is thus very helpful for those of us who are trying to make a case for the church’s reception of this particular diaconate. But in making that case, it has caused me to reflect on the language that we use. The following thoughts are by no means a critique of the synodical emphases or the customary descriptions of the diaconal vocation. They are intended only as a springboard for further conversation.

First, I do not want to give the wrong impression of the significance of word choices and labels. Orthodoxy cannot be reduced to vocabulary and syntax, guaranteed by getting the doctrinal formula precisely right. “Right teaching” is not the parroting of perfect phrases, but that which bears the work of the Holy Spirit for salvation. Pentecost proclaims that every tongue is a viable vehicle for the confession of faith in the Lord Jesus. On the other hand, language is not neutral or indifferent. Words do matter and have a force that outstrips “sticks and stones.” Further, as noted in Jeff Kloha’s recent blurb on dictionaries, the meaning of words is highly contextual, and it shifts and morphs as usage changes.

When it comes to the word “mercy,” there seem to be certain connotations worthy of sensitive reflection. When I was a kid, my older cousins would often like to play “mercy” with me—pretty much the same game as “uncle.” With my 7-year old hands crushed in the powerful grip of a 10-year old, I would finally squeal, “Mercy!” Magnanimously released by my cousin, I would then rub my sore, defeated knuckles. A crass example, but it makes the following point clearly: “Mercy” is the cry of the disadvantaged to those who have the upper hand. To have mercy on someone implies this disparity in status. Mercy is not a transaction between equals, but an act of benevolence from a position of privilege. The recipient has nothing to give in return, but must rely solely on the graciousness of one who has the luxury to be gracious.

How is the language of mercy used in the Scriptures? Much in the same way. The rich and powerful are called upon to show “mercy” to the widow and the orphan, the poor and the disadvantaged. At other times, the disadvantage is one of guilt or debt—a judge or king may have mercy and forgive a debt owed or forgo a harsher punishment. This language of mercy takes on its most poignant and beautiful expression when it refers to God’s relationship to his people. In every case, God is in the position of privilege (kind of part of the definition of God)—and we are in the position of...
need, dependency, and disadvantage. God is merciful in his gifts of rain, food, and daily provisions; he is merciful in his protection of his people from their enemies. God hears the cries for mercy from the sick, the oppressed, the marginalized. Think of the cries to Jesus, “Have mercy!” They are from the blind, the leper, and the mother of a dying child. They seek mercy from Jesus because he stands above their predicament. He possesses something they are without—something he can give—and they seek his benevolence, his grace. This, of course, seems right. When God is described as “merciful,” it is a beautiful thing.

Yet what happens when we use the term “mercy” to describe our actions toward our neighbor or the church’s orientation to the world? Are we to picture the Christian as one who is accustomed to a position of privilege? Is the church comprised of those who have the upper hand and thus from that place have the luxury to be gracious and merciful to a disadvantaged world? Interestingly, Paul writes that God did not choose the privileged—the rich, the wise, and the powerful—but the weak, the poor, and the foolish. So is “mercy” the right word?

Yes, and no, or maybe, or “why do you want to know?” Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.” Clearly, he thought it appropriate. Disciples of Jesus participate in the divine mercy of caring for the disadvantaged and forgiving debts and sins. As children of our heavenly Father, we too give gifts without expectation of return, but giving is risky. It can reinforce a disparity in privilege. In fact, it can create it—making debtors out of the needy and benefactors out of the benevolent with power as patrons. But the problem here is not gift-giving itself but sin. As C. S. Lewis described in his essay, “The Problem of Pain,” the fabric of this life has been created in such a way that there are necessarily haves and have-nots. We cannot occupy the same space, eat the same morsel, or spend the same dollar. But it is precisely this condition that offers the possibility of sharing and many other good turns for one another. Unfortunately, the same set of circumstances also produces the possibility of hoarding, exploitation, and oppression.

The church, especially in its institutional forms, has not always been successful at avoiding such sin. For example, we should remember the relatively recent and disturbing role of the church in colonialism, in which rich and powerful cultures exploited the weak and poor in a strange concoction of Western progress and the spread of the gospel. (It seems hardly accidental that the phrases “Manifest Destiny” and “Great Commission” were coined in the same era.) Perhaps our particular church body played a peripheral or negligible role in such past sins, and certainly the church could also be found fighting against the injustices of colonialism. Still, sensitivity to the church’s past abuses of power and privilege suggests some caution and clarity. Even the word “mission” sounds a little too militaristic today for what the church should be about.

Perhaps it is helpful to remember that in the context of God’s definitive expression of mercy—the gift of his Son—we find another striking word: “compassion.” Sometimes the word is used in parallel with “mercy” as a synonym, but in the context of the Gospels it seems to speak to something more distinct. Jesus not only gives gifts to his people from a position of privilege and power, but he looks out upon the peo-
people—people who are like “sheep without a shepherd,” people who are sick and hungry—and he is drawn to them from deep within his inner being (Gk.: splangkna). His heart goes out to them so to speak. He sees the grief of Lazarus’s sisters, and he weeps with them. His mercy extends from the vantage point of solidarity—he suffers with the suffering (L.: compassio). Thus it was the Samaritan, the marginalized and oppressed one—not the privileged Pharisee or Levite—who had “compassion” on the Jewish man at the side of the road. So also the waiting father, filled with “compassion,” humbled himself, indeed, disgraced himself in order to rush out and embrace his prodigal son. So it is in the form of a slave, in the death of a criminal, as a sinner on the cross—the point in which Jesus is united with us in our predicament most fully—that the mercy of God is most fully extended.

So what should we do now? Excise these words—some of which are biblical—from our vocabulary? Probably not. But I think how we use our words, especially when describing the church, is worth some careful consideration, not simply to give a good impression to those outside the church, but, perhaps more importantly, to teach ourselves who we have been called to be. The church surely has gifts to give, but we have also been called to come alongside one another and have a share in the burdens, to patiently suffer with the suffering. Care for the poor and disadvantaged begins to move beyond charity to community when the flow of gifts can move in both directions. Compassion means that we too are “needy” with self-sufficiency giving way to solidarity. And from this vantage point we are in a better position to point beyond ourselves to the One who has had mercy on us all. After all, before God’s grace and mercy, “Wir sind aller Bettler”—we are all beggars.

Erik Herrmann

Endnotes
1 http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=710
2 For the meaning of diakonia in the New Testament and Early Church, see John Collins, Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources (Oxford, 2009).
3 http://concordiatheology.org/2011/08/clear-as/
In 1843, a thirty-two year old pastor penned these words:

I have been taught the chief articles of Christian doctrine since my childhood and by my intellect have known “that a sinner becomes justified before God solely by faith in Christ.” Still, I confess I would not have known how to apply this doctrine to myself during the struggles of conscience and all the anxieties of the soul, nor truly believe, that I, too, have the forgiveness of sins, righteousness and life in Christ if God, by His Holy Spirit, had not enlightened me and taught it to me through the Gospel…Therefore it is not easy for…a sinner, to believe in the name of God’s Son…He will never by himself…dare to truly believe that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, has truly redeemed him and by His victory saved him “from sin, death, and the power of the devil.”

The author of these words did not reside in Saint Louis but in a small Finnish town, Pöytyä. These words introduced his commentary on Ephesians 1. This slight volume, entitled *Uskonoppi autuuteen* [The Joy of the Doctrine of Saving Faith], precipitated a revival of preaching and congregational life in the Lutheran confessional tradition that spread beyond Finland’s borders to other parts of the Baltic world.

Its author, Fredrik Gabriel Hedberg, was born in Saloinen in the Swedish-speaking area on the Finnish west coast on July 15, 1811, some three months before the birth of C. F. W. Walther. He studied at Åbo (Turku) and Helsinki before becoming ordained in 1834. In the next decade he served parishes in Lohja, Paimio, Raippaluoto, and finally Pöytyä after serving briefly as prison chaplain in Oulu. From 1855–1862, he was pastor in Kaarina and served almost thirty years thereafter in Kimito. His first two wives, Maria Johann Sofia Eklund and Louisa Wilhelmina Öhmann, died in 1858 and 1890 respectively; his third, Rosa Alexandra Juliette Lucander, survived him.

Hedberg rejected the rationalistic influences in his theological studies during his early years as pastor. His adherence to a pietist lay preacher, Paavo Ruotsalainen, earned the wrath of church officials, and this accounts for the frequent transfer of the young pastor. Increasingly troubled by the preaching of the law in Ruotsalainen’s movement, Hedberg began reading Martin Luther’s postils and turned away from his former favorites, such as Johann Arndt and Philip Jakob Spener. His reading turned ever more to Luther and the Book of Concord as well as Johann Gerhard and several contemporary authors prominent in the revival of Reformation and orthodox Lutheran thought. These included Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach, Wilhelm Löhe, Gottfried Thomasius, and Adolf Harleß. His connections with the Lutheran revival in Germany led him to raise money for the Old Lutherans (one of the constituent groups of the LCMS partner church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany), whose defiance of the Prussian government’s imposition of union on the Lutheran and Reformed churches brought persecution upon them. Hedberg’s Christological and sacramental emphases
complemented his insistence on salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. He celebrated the Lord’s Supper weekly at Kimito, a rare practice in his time. His reaction against the law preaching of pietist preachers led him to teach that the gospel alone should be proclaimed to those who trust in Christ so that they might live a life which produces the fruits of faith. Hedberg criticized pietistic legalism in a work, *Pietism and Christianity*, published in 1845. A decade later he attacked the growing Swedish Baptist movement in print.

His own followers organized the Lutheran Evangelical Association in Finland in 1873. Its missionaries have taken the gospel to many lands, including Kenya, where they work together with LCMS missionaries, and to other countries in which their cooperation with LCMS World Mission or Lutheran Hour Ministries has led to mutual profit. Hedberg’s followers also played an important leadership role in the organization of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. In 1964, after sixty-six years of existence, it merged into the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with which it had had close association since the 1920s.

In his exposition of Ephesians 1:22–23, Hedberg extended the concept of the church as Christ’s body to include the parallel depiction of God’s people as his bride. His comment offers a glimpse of his understanding of the gospel:

> It was amazing grace and a fire of wondrous love that moved the Son of God to offer Himself and willingly come down to save us, suffering greatly to the point of shedding His precious blood. . . . In love, He wanted us to be His own, His bride. He wanted us to be saved from the power of sin, death and Satan and own His treasures: eternal righteousness, freedom, salvation and eternal life. . . . He gives His life and blood to deliver us from this wretched and miserable existence and bring us to His eternal glory as well as render harmless the sins and faults which remain in us. Hence, the accusations of Satan, the judgments of the Law and the terrors of death cannot harm us, for He Himself answers for us saying: “Let my bride be. What do you want of her? If there is some imperfection in her, I will heal it. . . . If she is not good enough for you, let her remain so. It is enough that she is acceptable to Me, for I have chosen her to be my own and cleansed her, and I still want to cleanse her daily through the Word and Sacraments. Although she is burdened by sin, death and many shortcomings, I counter them with my righteousness, life and treasures that will not pass away. I wish to give her all these gifts. She may have them as her own, and she must have them.”

Hedberg’s voice remains part of the legacy of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Robert Kolb

**Endnotes**


2 Ibid., 138–139.
ARTICLES
Oral Performance of Biblical Texts in the Early Church

David Trobisch

At the end of the first letter to the Thessalonians (1Thes 5:26–28), Paul salutes the recipients with the words, “Greet all brothers with a holy kiss,” and he ends the letter with his usual wish, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” But between the greetings and the wish of grace he adds, “I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all brothers.”

When Paul asked a congregation to read his letter to everyone, what kind of script did he provide? What did the manuscript look like? What did early Christians use when they read texts during their worship services? Although we do not have the original letter Paul sent, we do have a good sense of what texts written to be performed before an audience looked like. Before the printing press was invented, every book had to be copied by hand. About 5,600 handwritten copies containing New Testament texts have survived to this day.

The format of these ancient texts forced readers to prepare for the reading in advance and make decisions about what elements would be emphasized in their reading. In some cases, readers even had to determine what to make the text mean, because structural markers found in our printed Bibles did not exist. By presenting the biblical text with a specific format, modern translators and editors may create the impression that the structure is part of the Greek text they translate. However, as the examples below demonstrate, such decisions are not always neutral; the public readers of scripture must prepare for the reading and be aware that they are free to—and may be required to—read in a way that differs from the text as presented in print.

Structural Markers

The oldest manuscripts of the New Testament provide the text in an unstructured format. Commas, periods, colons, question marks, and quotation marks are curiously absent. No paragraph breaks the flow; no spaces separate the words. The text body looks like a single, long word. Chapter numbers are not part of the manuscript tradition in antiquity, and when they were added to medieval manuscripts, they varied from manuscript to manuscript. The advent of printed editions in the sixteenth century made it possible to standardize chapters and introduce verse numbers.

David Trobisch taught New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, Missouri State University, Yale Divinity School, and Bangor Theological Seminary. He is recognized for his work on the letters of Paul, the formation of the Christian Bible, and biblical manuscripts. He now lives in Springfield, Missouri. A version of this essay was presented at Concordia Seminary’s Day of Exegetical Reflection, September 19, 2011.
In antiquity, performers of such texts had to make some of the same decisions that translators into modern languages have to make as they prepare their text for publication; they had to break up the flow of letters, the so-called scriptio continua, into words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. They had to discern titles, editorial additions, summaries, and other structural signals included in the body of text. They had to use their best judgment to identify unmarked notes and comments added by earlier editors. (Some translators, for example, put editorial comments that are part of the biblical text in parentheses like this.)

Nomina Sacra

In addition to having to structure the continuous flow of letters, performers of the Greek New Testament were confronted with the so-called nomina sacra, a system of contractions that had to be interpreted during the oral performance. These words were marked with a line over the letters, and only the first one or two characters and the last one or two characters of the word are written out. Instead of writing ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, for example, only the first and the last letter is noted, ΙΣ. The words Christ, Lord, God, and Jesus are almost always marked in this way; other words like father (reflecting that this could be a reference to God), son (reflecting “son of God” as a reference to Christ), Jerusalem (the celestial city), heaven (where God resides), and as many as thirty other words are noted often but not always as nomina sacra.³

This system is unparalleled in non-Christian literature of the period. The origins are obscure, and the phenomenon continues to pose unanswered questions to the scholarly community. Nevertheless, it is clear that performers were expected to decode the contractions as they read aloud to an audience.

For example, the beginning of 2 Corinthians 1:3 in the oldest witness for this passage—the Chester Beatty Papyrus P46 (ca. 200 CE)⁴—is written as:

Before someone can read the passage fluently, spaces, breathing marks, and punctuation have to be added, and the nomina sacra have to be decoded:

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν
Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν

To imagine the challenges a performer faced, try reading the following English text out loud. Like the oldest copies of the New Testament, it is written in capital letters with spaces and punctuation removed and typical nomina sacra contracted:

PAULASERVANTOFJSCHTCALLEDTOBEANAPOSTLESETAPARTFOR
THEGOSPELOFGDWHICHHEPROMISEDBEFOREHANDTHROUGH
HISPROPHETSINTHEHOLYSCRIPTURESTHEGOSPELCONCERNING
HISSNWHOASDESCENDEDFROMDDACCORDINGTOTHEFLESH
Breaking up the continuous flow of letters into words requires an interpretative decision. The sequence “PAULASERVANTOFJSCHT” can be read as “Paula, servant of Jesus Christ” or as “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ”—the context will decide. Although it is not too difficult to understand the text at first reading, it is almost impossible to read an unfamiliar text aloud in a way that an audience could follow.

Today, we perceive printed text as visual information—dark spots on a light background—to be decoded quietly. In antiquity, however, literature was designed by its authors to be read out loud. Just like sheet music today, ancient manuscripts were seen as a medium that preserved sound and required a performer to study it before it could be presented in a meaningful way.

The following examples from modern translations demonstrate how modern editors struggle with some of the same challenges a performer of literature in antiquity would have faced.

**Editorial Asides**

In John 1:38–39, a short dialogue between Jesus and his disciples is interrupted by an editorial comment:

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.”

The narrator steps out of the story and, addressing his Greek speaking audience directly, explains that the word *Rabbi* is best translated into Greek as “teacher.”

How would a public reader make clear to the congregation that this portion of text is an aside, since the hearers do not have the visual cues of parentheses? A skilled performer, for example, might turn slightly and face the audience directly as he delivers the explanation, then return to his original posture to continue the dialogue in the narrative world of the story. The Gospel According to John is full of such asides. The editors of the NRSV chose to put them between parentheses.

**Women Should be Quiet in Church**

When verse numbers were added to printed editions of the Greek text in the sixteenth century, the publisher structured 1 Corinthians 14:32–34 the following way:

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.
33 For God is a God not of disorder but of peace as in all the churches of the saints.
34 Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as the law also says.

The phrase “as in all the churches of the saints” is connected to the previous sentence, underlining that God is a God of peace everywhere. “Women should be silent in churches” forms a new sentence. The King James Version followed their Greek edition. The translators of the Revised Standard Version (1946), however, structured the passage differently:
32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. // As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the law says.

The clause “as in all the churches of the saints” is drawn to the following sentence and seems to give Paul’s statement that women should be quiet more weight. Is this a reflection of the mid-twentieth century translators’ attitude towards the ordination of women, a debate that raged for decades among the Protestant denominations for whom this translation was prepared?

The New Revised Standard Version (1989) goes to great lengths to provide a gender inclusive translation of the Christian Bible. The editors follow the Revised Standard Version as far as the structure is concerned, but they put the passage concerning the women in parentheses:

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. // (As in all the churches of the saints, 34 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as the law also says.)

The editors probably do this in support of the widely held exegetical theory that these sentences were not written by Paul but added by an early editor. Or do the parentheses also reflect the fact that most Protestant denominations were ordaining women by the time the NRSV was edited? Whatever the reason, this example demonstrates how the relevance of a passage shifts simply by adding punctuation marks to a text.

The Illiterate Reader

An interesting document dated February 5, 304 CE, describes a certain Aurelius Ammonius, the lector of a Christian congregation (ἀναγνωστὴς ἐκκλησίας), sending an official letter to the authorities. He declares that the church owned no property except a few bronze objects. Although the lector is obviously the person who performed the scriptures during the worship services, he has to hire a scribe, a certain Aurelius Serenus, to write the letter. The lector was illiterate.

Quintilian, the famous Roman teacher of rhetoric and contemporary of Paul required students to memorize classic speeches “and declaim them standing in the manner which actual pleading require: thus he will simultaneously train delivery, voice and memory.” Holding a manuscript would not allow the performer to imitate the body language of the public speaker.

At first, an illiterate or blind reader sounds perplexing. However, once it is made clear that ancient manuscripts could only be read after intensive preparation, which almost certainly included an effort to memorize the manuscript, the notion makes sense. A good memory becomes more important than literacy or even eyesight. Just as people who are blind sometimes aspire to be great musicians, a person who cannot read can still be an excellent performer.
Another glimpse into the life of the early Church is provided in First Timothy. Timothy is prepared for his leadership role in Ephesus by reminding him of three qualities of a good pastor, “Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading (ἀνάγνωσις), to exhorting, to teaching” (1 Tm 4:13). It is not teaching or counseling, but rather the quality of the performance of literature which is mentioned first.

These remarks indicate that in antiquity reading a New Testament manuscript to an audience required preparation. At a minimum, the scriptio continua had to be structured and the nomina sacra had to be decoded before a text could be performed. It is also clear that excellent performances of literature were done from memory.

Early Christian Sanctuaries

At the time when the New Testament writings originated, Christians met in private homes or—like other Hellenistic cult groups—rented rooms in restaurants for their meetings. First Corinthians documents that the meetings of the “Church of God in Corinth” (1Cor 1:2) were organized around a full meal (1Cor 11:21). A certain Gaius is prominently featured in the letter (1Cor 1:14) and might be identical with Paul’s Corinthian host mentioned in Romans, “Gaius, who is host to me (ὁ ξένος μου) and to the whole church, greets you” (Rom 16:23).

This Gaius may very well be the same person to whom 3 John is addressed and who is praised by the author of the letter for hosting traveling Christian brothers (3 Jn 5–8). If these connections reflect historical reality, then Gaius must have had a house large enough for the congregation. He may have been an innkeeper. But even if the mentioning of Gaius in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and 3 John refers to two or three different individuals, from the perspective of a reader it is plausible that only a wealthy individual with a large home is a likely candidate to sponsor and host the dinner meetings of a Christian group.

Archeological evidence can give us an idea of how large these dining rooms were. This opens a window for us to see what Paul and the other authors of the New Testament envisioned when they designed their writings to be performed before an audience.

The images and descriptions of shared meals and symposia of the time presuppose that the participants lay down to eat. One would lie on a couch (κλίινη or lectus) with the head resting on the left arm and a cushion in the back. This way the right arm was free to take the food. The dining room is called triclinium, deriving its name from the three couches which were typically arranged in the back of the room around a square table. On each couch there would normally be room for three or four people to lie next to each other, but the size varied. If the dining party was larger, several groups of three couches could be arranged in a larger dining room. It has been pointed out that a party of twelve companions, i.e. the presider and twelve members of a symposium, was remarkably common and that the size of a triclinium typically accommodated from seven to fifteen people. Furthermore, if the size of the group exceeded the size of the dining room, the group was divided and a new group congregated in another
home or another location. The greeting list in Romans 16 mentions more than 30 persons, and five times a Christian household is mentioned (Rom 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15).

Sources further indicate that it was the privilege of men to lie on the couches during the meals. For women and children, it was appropriate to sit either on the couch of the husband or father or on low chairs (subsellium) placed before the host.

Lying down to eat, which in earlier times was the privilege of the nobility, was still a social marker in New Testament times. Sueton, for example, relates an anecdote in which the freed slave and comedy writer Terence (Publius Terentius Afer) first sits on one of the low chairs, but after he impressed the host Caecilius through his performance, he was asked to move up and take his place with the host:

Having been introduced while Caecilius was at supper, and being meanly dressed, he [Terence] is reported to have read the beginning of the play seated on a low stool near the great man’s couch. But after reciting a few verses, he was invited to take his place at table, and, having supped with his host, went through the rest to his great delight.

Suetonius, De Poetis: Vita Terenti 2

“Being meanly dressed” seems to be the social marker requiring the freed slave Terence to sit on the little chair instead of dining on a couch. The letter of James reflects on the status of church members and their place at the dining table during the worship services. Again, the clothes of the individual are referenced:

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please’ while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2–4 [NRSV])

According to the letter of James, poor people and slaves were expected to stand or sit. This implies that lying down was the privilege of the rich and the free.

About Translations

Which translation should be used for performances? The answer is simple and conforms to the old pastoral wisdom: the best Bible translation is the one you read. If an audience is used to the King James Version, this will be the one to use. If it uses the New Revised Standard Version or the New International Version, the performer should go with that translation. If an audience is flexible, the Contemporary English Version, which was produced by the American Bible Society, is a good selection, as translators have paid great attention to how it sounds to make sure that even an unchurched audience can understand the canonical texts from antiquity. If an audience allows for paraphrasing and narrative commentary, performers may opt for that approach. When someone asks, “What is a good translation?” the answer should be, “Tell me who is listening and I will tell you which translation will work.”
When a biblical passage—a story, a psalm, or an exhortation—is performed paperless, from memory, the performer will typically translate the text “from English into English.” The intonation, gestures, and movements will provide a subtext that interprets the script and often speaks louder than the exact wording of the translation. Just like preachers, performers have to choose from the possible meanings of a passage they want to convey to their audience on that particular day.

**Example**

In the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman (Jn 7:53–8:11), the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman and made her stand before all of them (NRSV). The performer was doing the text while walking through the pews. At this point he gestured to a parishioner to stand up and walk with him to the altar, and without saying a word, he turned her around and “made her stand before all of them.”

At this point in the story the elders, scribes, and Pharisees left the scene and Jesus asked, “Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?” The performer whispered to the woman, “Say, ‘No one, sir,’” and continued, “She said,” the parishioner responded: “No one, sir.” The performer addressed the woman: And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.”

Then the performer turned to the audience and placed himself between the woman and the congregation as if to protect “her” from “them.” He looked at the people in the pews, and meeting the eyes of individuals he raised both arms and blessed them, sending them home with the words, “Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Without changing the translation, the performer conveyed the message of the story he decided to deliver that morning to this audience. That day and for that audience the story was not about the woman who had done wrong, it was about those who condemned her. Although listeners will be aware that in the narrative Jesus spoke the last sentence to the adulterous woman, the performer opened them up for another way of reading the story, one that may make you feel uncomfortable sitting in the pews watching one of your own, who “was made to stand before them.”

**Summary**

The earliest manuscripts of the Christian Bible, the archeological evidence of the *triclinia*, and the literary evidence in the New Testament suggest that a typical performance of a letter of Paul and later, of other Christian literature would be heard by a group consisting of between seven and fifteen members. They would meet for a full meal in the evening, and after the meal sacred texts would be performed as part of the worship service.

Today, we are facing a different situation. Our congregations are bigger than the early house churches, the full meal is reduced to the ritual celebration of the “Lord’s Supper” with a piece of bread and a sip of wine or grape juice, we meet on Sunday mornings instead of Sunday evenings, and the performance of the sacred text is often reduced to the reading of the lectionary selection from a printed book.
For many years now, together with friends and colleagues, I have encouraged congregational leaders to revive the early church practice of performing biblical texts from memory instead of reading them from a printed Bible. I have worked with congregations and taught the approach in the classroom, helped lectionary groups prepare for the Sunday reading, and taught three credit courses that focused on the memorization and performance of a letter of Paul or a prophet or a gospel. The experience has been overwhelmingly positive.

When Bible texts are performed, they are heard with fresh ears by the audience and also by the performer. Over and over, I have witnessed the moment when a familiar biblical text becomes meaningful through performance—or to say it in biblical language—the moment, when the Word of God becomes flesh in our human existence.

Endnotes

1 Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁδόλφοις.
6 Σὺ στῆθι ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιον μου.
To inquire about the “real” or authoritative text of the Book of Concord is to ask questions in ways that were hardly conceivable in the time of its origins. This anachronistic query reflects the ways in which technological developments form our presuppositions and shape our concerns. It reveals our presumptions that arise from our ability to distribute texts through very recent developments in typography and by electronic means in thousand- and million-fold copies that are exactly the same. The technology of the first centuries of the Gutenberg era was not so advanced. Our search for a precise, “authentic” text also reveals a bit of the need for security, secure knowledge, that marks our thinking in a society ever more hostile to the Christian faith and to the very concept of truth.

At the time of its initial publication the four or five printings of the Book of Concord found acceptance and general approbation among those who subscribed to the Concordia in the years leading up to its official publication in 1580. A new, improved translation of the German original into Latin supplanted the first translation of 1580, in 1584. The original printing of the Formula of Concord, which had been completed in 1577 and circulated among the Evangelical governments and their ministerial for adoption and subscription, had appeared in print in 1579 in Dresden and Dessau. The Dresden printers Matthes Stöckel and Gimel Bergen had begun the massive task of setting type for the book in the summer of 1578, while its final form was still assuming shape. As the printers began their task, Jakob Andreae, the key diplomatic negotiator in the final drive for concord, was still working on a preface for the Book designed to draw in more governments and their ministeria, and his most important co-author of the Formula, Martin Chemnitz, was aiding Andreae in the preparation of the “Catalog of Testimonies” of ancient fathers in support of the Christology of Article VIII of the Formula. Two local pastors, Peter Glaser and Caspar Fuger, were reading the page proofs, and Glaser was preparing an index to guide users to the proper passages for addressing various doctrinal topics.

It is true that in the two or three years immediately after its appearance the theologians of Duke Julius of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel did raise questions about

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textual variants in the printings of 1580. The most important of these was the omission of Luther’s *Taufbüchlein* and *Traubüchlein* from the Heidelberg printing. That was done as a part of a larger effort to attract and acquire the support of Elector Ludwig of the Palatinate. The other two Evangelical German electors of the Holy Roman Empire, August of Saxony and Johann Georg of Brandenburg, had led the final effort to produce the Formula of Concord. Then, in the months following its composition, they were among the most active promoters of the Book of Concord as a new “body of doctrine” governing the public teaching of the churches of the Wittenberg Reformation. They wanted very much to include their fellow elector from the Palatinate in this new agreement on public doctrine, for he represented a significant strengthening of the political position of the adherents of the Augsburg Confession in the Empire. Ludwig’s father, Frederick III, the Pious, had caused no end of problems within the Evangelical circles of the Empire’s leadership with his introduction of Calvinist teaching into the Palatinate, as expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession. To win the son for their cause, August and Johann Georg urged Andreae to draft the preface to the Book of Concord to convince Ludwig that he could subscribe to the Formula of Concord without causing havoc in his lands. Andreae’s explanation of its origin and its intent only to repeat the teaching of the Augsburg Confession met Ludwig’s concerns, but he nonetheless insisted on the omission of the *Taufbüchlein* and *Traubüchlein*, chiefly because many of his pastors regarded Luther’s baptismal exorcism as superstitious. In Saxony, Württemberg, and other lands which had accepted the Book of Concord, the inclusion of these two works usually contained in editions of Luther’s Small Catechism posed no problems. Thus, in fact, the adoption of the Book was in part dependent on this particular textual variation.

It is also true that this variation did not generate second thoughts about the *Concordia* in the mind of the duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel. Between 1568 and 1577 Julius had invested a great deal of money and diplomatic effort in the attempts to reach concord on the disputes dividing the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. However, his decision in 1578 to have his sons tonsured in the lower orders of the Roman Catholic clergy structure in order to permit them to take over ecclesiastical territories elicited fierce criticism. Accusations that the duke was betraying the Lutheran confession of the faith came from theologians, including the leading thinker in the construction of the *Concordia*, Martin Chemnitz, superintendent of the churches in Braunschweig, a city within Julius’s own realm. The critique was echoed by some of Julius’ fellow princes, including the two electors. This criticism soured the prince on the Concordist endeavor. His theologians sought ways in which he could counter these attacks and found one in the endeavor to undermine the Concordist settlement. The formulations of Lutheran Christology in Article VIII of the Formula provided the most important basis for their political-theological maneuvering. The textual variations provided another justification of Julius’s petulance even though almost none of his fellow Lutherans had an issue with them.

This attitude toward minor textual variations may well have been due to the general attitude of that age toward texts. A little more than a century earlier all written texts
had been subject to the whims and weaknesses of copyists, above all monks, who produced the manuscripts, with inevitable slips of pen and concentration. Roman Catholic leaders had welcomed the printing press as a means for establishing liturgical conformity. Spanish officials, for example, ordered more than fifteen thousand copies of breviaries and missals from the Antwerp printer, Christoffel Plantijn, but any larger printing faced the challenge of precise agreement of differing versions because of the nature of the type-setting of that era. Once set, the type was good for a limited number of copies. Larger editions required more than one setting of type. The differences among the copies of the Book of Concord are largely due, for instance, to regional differences and the caprice of the typesetter. Different typesetters heard words in different ways, and because no standard orthography governed printing, variations could arise in the effort to communicate clearly the text being copied. In the case of the Concordia, the Swabians in Tübingen, the Palatines in Heidelberg, and the Saxons in Dresden had significantly differing habits of pronunciation. Thus, the Book of Concord contained spelling differences; “myriad deviations,” in the words of Thomas von Hagel, who further comments “many are of little import while a few are more substantial.” But even these do not lead to explicit contradictions between the versions.

For Europeans of the late sixteenth century, therefore, the authority of texts was established by their content, not by the precision of their reproduction. Radical diversions in content of different editions elicited critique, but minor variations did not. Most important in our consideration of the text of the Book of Concord is the fact that no serious theological disparities among the editions were found. Julius’ theologians aimed their critique of the Formula’s Christology at the content of all printings of the Book, not at any discrepancies among the printed versions.

Elector August of Saxony had assumed leadership of the Concordist negotiations, both in formulating its text and in soliciting the subscription of fellow rulers and the ministeria of their churches. Therefore, the printing of the text in the city of his court, Dresden, assumed a key role in the publication of the Book. Its printing in Magdeburg, in part under the direction of the same printer who coordinated the presses that produced the Dresden edition, initially served above all electoral Brandenburg since the administrator of the archbishopric of Magdeburg, Joachim Friedrich, was Johann Georg’s son, although the printer of the theologians of his university in Frankfurt an der Oder, Johann Eichorn, also issued the Concordia in 1581. The government of Württemberg, where Andreae served as an important ducal counselor and diplomat as well as professor of theology at the University of Tübingen, had its edition published in Tübingen at the same time as the Dresden edition. Finally, the Heidelberg edition came from presses under the control of Elector Ludwig, in 1582. Minor variations exist not only among these four editions but even within the copies produced in the four cities, as von Hagel’s research shows.

Because some of the sharpest criticism of the Formula of Concord objected to Article VIII, on the person of Christ, Chemnitz and Andreae prepared a “Catalog of Testimonies” from the ancient church fathers to support the Lutheran position on the communication of attributes and related questions. Elector Ludwig protested against its
inclusion as an “appendix” in some early printings, and it appeared in spite of a Saxon government directive forbidding its insertion. Therefore, this “Catalog” was seen as a supporting supplement rather than as an integral part of the Book of Concord, and it did not appear in all versions.\footnote{11}

The Book of Concord was first of all the confession and doctrinal standard of the princes and municipal governments that had guided its acceptance by the pastors and teachers in their jurisdiction. The princes and the council members in the towns read German, but many could not read Latin. Therefore, Justus Jonas’s German translation of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession was used in the \textit{Concordia}, as was a German translation of the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope and the ancient creeds. Latin was, however, the medium of instruction of the clergy who would bind themselves to its teaching. The first Latin translation was produced by Andreae’s brother-in-law, the court preacher Lukas Osiander, probably with help from his colleague on the Tübingen faculty, Jakob Heerbrand. The text was revised by Chemnitz, and a translation of the Smalcald Articles was supplied by Nikolaus Selnecker, one of Elector August’s own Saxon theologians and also a member of the committee that had prepared the final text of the Solid Declaration. This translation was so plagued by mistakes that it earned Selnecker’s criticism along with complaints from others. Selnecker alone undertook the task a second time. First published in 1582, it underwent revision by Chemnitz and appeared in altered form in 1584.\footnote{12} The translation of 1584 became the standard textbook of the Lutheran universities into the nineteenth century.

That means that this Latin translation of the 1580 German editions served as the text with which those ordained to the ministry for two hundred years were most familiar. The Latin text went through at least nineteen printings after 1584 and before 1800; the German text experienced at least ten.\footnote{13} For their lectures and disputations, in which they learned the theology of the \textit{Concordia},\footnote{14} the future pastors of German, Nordic and eastern European churches, as well as those in other lands, depended on Selnecker’s second translation.

That situation changed in 1848 when a pastor in Franconia, Johann Tobias David Inmanuel Paul Müller (1804–1884) edited the “symbolical books of the evangelical-Lutheran Church” in parallel columns, using the 1584 Latin edition and “the editions of 1579–1580” for the German. It appeared in twelve successive printings over the next eighty years. In his preface, Müller commented on the problems of tracing the differences between the text of 1580 and the texts of the original documents. Müller’s adoption of the translation of 1584 for the Latin versions of the documents seemed natural, given its use for more than a century and a half. The German presented more of a challenge, he noted, since spelling differences did occur in accord with local practices. He did not explain how he adjudicated among “the first editions of the Concordia from 1579–1580” in assembling his German texts.\footnote{15} He included the “Catalog of Testimonies” and the \textit{Taufbüchlein} and \textit{Taußbüchlein} at the end of the volume.

In North America, the first English translation, produced by Ambrose and Socrates Henkel in 1851, translated the German edition of 1790\footnote{16} and compared it with a Dresden printing of 1580, loaned to them by Charles Porterfield Krauth.\footnote{17} The Henkels turned to a very recent edition of the Latin\footnote{18} as well.\footnote{19}
Henry Eyster Jacobs, professor, dean, and then president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mount Airy (Philadelphia), edited the texts of the document in the Book of Concord. Jacobs used the first edition of the Latin Apology as the basis, thus departing from the 1580 text, because Jacobs believed that the German translation of Justus Jonas was Jonas's own paraphrase. He did not realize that Melanchthon, largely at Luther's instigation, had revised his original text and published this second edition a half year later as the standard text for most of the next forty years. Jacobs used the German of the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord, and the Latin of the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. Jacobs also noted that he had used the Latin edition of Friedrich Franke and also consulted the second edition of the Henkel translation. Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, professor Frederick Bente employed the Jacobs translation as the basis for the English of his *Concordia Triglotta*.

The decision to edit the “confessional writings of the evangelical Lutheran church” anew in the 1920s brought together an impressive team of Reformation scholars of the time. That edition was produced by a team that included Hans Lietzmann of the University of Berlin, director of the project, who edited the ancient creeds; Heinrich Bornkamm of the University of Heidelberg, editor of the Augsburg Confession and Apology; Hans Volz of the University of Göttingen, who produced the editions of the Smalcald Articles, Luther’s catechisms, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope; and Ernst Wolf of the Universities of Tübingen and then Göttingen, editor of the Formula of Concord. This team went back to as original a text as it could determine. For example, it constructed its rendering of the Augsburg Confession from a variety of manuscripts, with comments on the *editio princeps* of 1531 in the notes. It used the first edition of the Apology instead of the second despite the fact that the latter had been in use for most of the period from 1531 to 1577 and had served as the foundation for most of Justus Jonas’s translation into German (which appeared in the Book of Concord of 1580). Jakob Andreae’s manuscript from which the Formula of Concord was printed in 1580 served as the primary one for the 1930 edition—its variations from the printed version are minimal.

This “Göttingen” edition served as the basis for the translation of Theodore Tappert, the text of the Book of Concord from which a majority of living English-speaking Lutheran pastors learned its content. This translation followed the model of the Heidelberg printing of 1580 insofar as the *Taufbüchlein* and *Traubbüchlein* were omitted even though the 1930 edition had included them. Under the direction of Irene Dingel, professor of historical theology at the Evangelical theological faculty of the University of Mainz and director of the Institut für europäische Geschichte in Mainz, a new edition of the Book of Concord is being prepared.

Technological capabilities certainly limited the concern regarding the precise and “official” text of the Book of Concord in the sixteenth century. Again, in the sixteenth century nearly all those who accepted the Book recognized that, although the variations are not inconsiderable in number, they are largely insignificant in content. Sixteenth century theologians believed that what was important was their content, which was the same in various printings of both languages. This made the question of an “official” or “master” version of little significance, perhaps apart from the governments that
sponsored the various printings and had commercial interest in their success. Indeed, the Saxon court added the Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592 to its official republications of the *Concordia*, but other governments and ministeria did not.\textsuperscript{27}

The Book of Concord functions as the secondary authority for a majority of Lutheran churches, a “binding summary, basis, rule, and guiding principle [for determining] how all teaching is to be judged in accord with God’s Word and how the errors that have arisen are to be explained and decided in Christian fashion.”\textsuperscript{28} The text of such a binding summary must command consensus among those who accept it if it is to serve as this kind of standard for interpreting Scripture and teaching the Christian faith. In the history of the Lutheran confession, however, the text of the Book of Concord has been recognized as validly conveyed in both German and Latin texts, and in translations into a number of languages. The first generation of those who lived out their faith on the basis of its confession knew the text from a number of printings, some in German and some in Latin, some from north German presses and some from south German printers.

In the twenty-first century, our concern must be the proclamation and confession of the teaching which our confessions deliver to us from Scripture. God the Holy Spirit is at work in his church through the word, a word that kills and makes alive, as it always has. It continues to do so through the instrument of the *Concordia* in all the forms and versions that convey its life-giving gospel.

**Endnotes**

5. Among the seven electors, three were Roman Catholic archbishops, and the King of Bohemia was the Habsburg emperor Maximilian II until his death in 1576 and then his son Rudolf II.
12. *Bekenntnisschriften* XLIV.
13. We have been able to determine the following publications in German: Leipzig, 1603, 1622, 1739, 1766, 1790; Stuttgart, 1611; Weimar (?), 1625; Halle, 1747; Jena, 1750, Wittenberg, 1760. Latin editions
appeared primarily in Leipzig, from the Lamberg press, 1602, 1618, 1622, 1626, from the Groß press, 1677, 1686, 1692, 1698, 1702, 1705, 1719, 1724, 1725, 1732, 1742, 1756; and from Strengnäs, 1669; and in Tübingen, 1730. Three German/Latin editions appeared, one in Leipzig, 1708, 1735 one in Jena, 1735. In all likelihood this list can be expanded.


*Concordia Triglotta*, (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921).

See the report on this edition, Irene Dingel, “‘Controversia et Confessio.’ The culture of controversy leading to confessional consolidation in the late sixteenth century,” *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 80 (2009): 266–278.

Finally, the author wishes to thank Charles Arand for his insights and ongoing conversation in contributing to this article.
In 1580, the fiftieth anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, the followers of the teachings of Martin Luther compiled and printed the *Concordia* (Konkordienbuch in German and Book of Concord in English), a collection of patristic creeds and reformation confessions that served as the authoritative profession of the Christian faith for the Evangelical Lutherans. In 1580, the *Concordia* was published at Dresden, Magdeburg, Tübingen, and Leipzig. These were the first and formative editions in a long series of ecclesial and academic editions and translations of the *Concordia*. These 1580 editions vary in their physical composition and ecclesial merit. Concerning the former, the editions of Dresden, Magdeburg, and Tübingen were printed in folio-style and in the German language whereas that of Leipzig is quarto and Latin. In regard to spiritual authority in the Lutheran Church, the Dresden edition is the premier text; it was the official electoral Saxon text in which were printed the names of the approximately 8,000 Lutheran pastors who subscribed to manuscript copies of the Formula of Concord. These signatures had been gathered in regional gatherings of pastors over the months following the conference in Bergen in May 1577, which revised the “Torgau Book” of 1576 into the “Solid Declaration of the Formula.”

Bibliographic examination has gradually progressed in the identification of the 1580 “Dresden” *Concordia*, printed by Matthes Stöckel and Gimel Bergen. The *National Union Catalog: Pre-1956 Imprints* (NUC) identified this edition as NL 0572616 and located it in seven US libraries (NUC 346.518). The *Verzeichnis der im Deutschen Sprachbereich Er schienenen Drucke des XVI: Jahrhunderts* (VD 16) then noted that there were variant printings of this edition and produced five categories—K 1990, K 1991, K 1992, K 1993, and K 1994—to differentiate and identify ten volumes in five German libraries (VD 16 10.591-92). This analysis was based upon variations on the title page and colophon. The bibliographic work of VD 16 surpassed that of NUC.

It has been shown that disparities among the 1580 Dresden printings run a bit deeper than negligible differences on the title page and colophon (Von Hagel 13–36). Among the exemplars from the 1580 “Dresden” *Concordia*, an array of minor typographical and illustrative variances exist. Concerning the first, 392.2 1580 c.1 at Concordia Historical Institute (CHI) in St. Louis includes the typographical errors of 157 for leaf 158, 121 for 221, and 129 for 229; whereas in 392.2 1580 c.2 at CHI the leaves are
correctly paginated. In regard to the second, the ornament at the end of the foreword (22v) to the *Apologia der Confession* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession) differs between BX 8068 .A2 1580 c.6 (Fig 1) and BX 8068 .A2 1580 c.7 (Fig 2), both at Concordia Seminary Library in St. Louis. Of much greater theological and ecclesial import, 265.3 Theol.2° at Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel has the *Trawbüchlein* (Marriage Booklet) and the *Tauffbüchlein* (Baptism Booklet) attached to the *Kleine Catechismus* (Small Catechism), while 312 Theol.2° at the same library (and the majority of other exemplars) excises them. These are but a few examples of the myriad deviations: some are quite obvious while others are rather subtle; many are of little import while a few are more substantial.

This bibliography locates 130 copies of the 1580 Dresden *Concordia* in institutional libraries in fourteen countries to abet further and more detailed bibliographic examination for the two-fold purpose of precise identification of a particular tome and critical appraisal of the variant tomes.

n.b.: The title page for each volume is dated M.D.LXXX; however, the colophon may have M.D.LXXIX, M.D.LXXX, or M.D.LXXXI at the bottom of the leaf.

n.b.: BX8068.A2 1580, Walther Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN is online: www.lutheranlegacy.org/booklist.asp.

*Concordia. Dresden: Matthes Stöckel and Gimel Bergen, 1580.*

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Figure 1 – BX 8068 .A2 1580 c.6 (leaf 22v), Concordia Seminary Library

Figure 2 – BX 8068 .A2 1580 c.7 (leaf 22v), Concordia Seminary Library

References


HOMILETICAL HELPS
Proper 28 • Matthew 25:14–30 • November 13, 2011

Financial institutions spend no little effort to keep the public informed about the many different kinds of investment opportunities which are regularly available. There are the popular IRA, long-term and short-term CDs at varying interest rates, and this or that kind of tax shelter. The rich and the poor alike do well to examine how they might best manage whatever assets they have.

In the kingdom of heaven there are investment opportunities also. When the Lord talked with his disciples privately on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24:3) to inform them about his second coming, he also spoke about kingdom investments in the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14–30).

Investment Opportunities

Capital is supplied

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. After that miracle they were to be his “witnesses . . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Lord is like the man in the parable. He has gone into a far country and has left servants behind to use the gifts that he has given.

The Lord’s work, of course, is that which pertains to the kingdom of heaven, for God our Savior “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). Salvation has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. The Lord’s followers are to announce this good news to the whole world.

The Word and Sacraments are the Lord’s means by which people are brought into the kingdom of God, but the same Lord who has provided those means has also chosen to use people to proclaim the message throughout the world. That task requires gifts and abilities, money and energy. With the Parable of the Talents, Jesus meant to impress upon his followers that he has equipped us with the material and personal resources that are needed to carry out kingdom work. The capital has been supplied, as it were, and the Lord has given us opportunities to invest that capital of gifts.

The man in the parable distributed talents with a great deal of wisdom. He gave each servant according to that servant’s ability (v. 15). The Lord asks us to manage no more than he knows we can handle. Something has been given to each one to invest. Our lives are not our own. They belong to him who bought us. Our talents are not our own. They have been given to us. Although the Lord does not by any means deprive us of the privilege of using his gifts for personal purposes, at the same time he wants us to know that his gifts are capital for kingdom investment. We are to invest for him.
Growth is possible

Investment in kingdom work is not futile. The men who had received five and two talents proceeded to trade with the money which had been given to them. Each had a high degree of success, for each doubled the capital which the master had given (vv. 16-17). The success of these men reminds us of the Word of the Lord in Isaiah 55:11: “My word . . . shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” In the kingdom of God success is not only possible, it is guaranteed. What an encouragement for anyone to spend himself and his resources! Often we invest time, money, and energy without the least assurance that our labors will have any success. It is not that way with kingdom investments. The blessing of the Lord rests upon our faithful labors. He wills that his purposes be carried out through the use of the talents which he has given.

A special bonus might also be attached to the talent investments which we make in the Lord’s service. For the two faithful servants in the parable, such a bonus came at the time of the accounting. They were able to see the extent of their success, and their animated “Look, five/two other talents I have gained” (see the ἑδραίον and the word order in the Greek text, vv. 20, 22) suggests that they had found their work exciting.

Such bonuses still come when we invest our talents in his service. The work of the kingdom is not drudgery because it deals not just with things temporal but with things eternal. It is rewarding to trade in valuable commodities. What reward and excitement, then, to be able to employ one’s talents in the enterprises of the eternal God.

Accountability is required

Since our talents are gifts from God (vv. 14–15), we are not at all surprised that there should be accountability for that which we have received. For the third servant in the parable, this became a tragic event, for he had been wicked and lazy. He failed to exercise even a minimum of good judgment by neglecting to deposit his one talent for interest with a banker. He tried to excuse his sloth and negligence by alleging that the master was a harsh despot, an unfounded allegation in view of the generosity of him who had distributed his goods (a talent was not an insignificant amount of coinage).

The fact of the matter is that the third servant didn’t want to work for his master. He was satisfied to be considered a part of the household but was willing to leave the doing to others. His relationship falls into the theological category of faith without works (Jas 2:17–26). He was a hypocrite and enemy of his master and for that reason was cast out. Investment opportunities had also been available to him, but he had failed to seize them. His tragic end stands as a warning to all who refuse to let their faith come into a life of action.

For those who have been faithful there is joy at the day of reckoning. Even as the talents of the two dutiful servants had been gifts of grace, so their Lord’s final acknowledgement exceeded all expectations. They were placed in charge of many things. What had they done? The capital had been given to them and the growth on the investment hadn’t been of their doing, for investors have very little control over the gains on their investments. A wise and faithful use of talents, however, does please the
Lord. That was the commendable activity of their faith-life which received praise at the accounting.

A day of reckoning is a reminder that we have never been perfect in taking advantage of the investment opportunities of service in the kingdom of our Lord. For our failings, we must seek pardon in Christ. In his forgiveness, however, we also receive power which enables us to be better investors of our God-given talents in the future.

Wayne E. Schmidt

Proper 29 • Matthew 25:31–46 • November 20, 2011

This is a difficult text. Not that it is difficult to understand. In fact, it is altogether too easy to grasp the meaning, which is precisely what makes it difficult. There is no question about the message Jesus intends to convey with this poignant parable. There is no dodging the impact of the message with claims of obscurity or interpretative uncertainty. The text is clear and confronts us with the unsettling reality that if this were all we had of Jesus’s teaching, we would be consigned to a religion of work-righteousness. But we do have more, and the context provided by that further teaching provides a legitimate solution to the dilemma of this text. The peril facing contemporary preachers striving for doctrinal fidelity is to over-correct the works-righteous trajectory of Jesus’s teaching, and so eviscerate the text of its substance and blunt its sharp barbs.

The solution to the apparent bind is to discern the cause for the separation of sheep from goat (the only categories into which people are placed). The standard is not human performance. The criteria of judgment lie well beyond the actions of sheep or goat. The distinction was fixed “from the foundation of the world.” The sheep are the elect, chosen by God. They do nothing to lay claim on their place at Jesus’s right hand. They are righteous by grace in Christ. For the goats, the accursed, there is no mention of a place prepared from eternity. Indeed, so unusual and unexpected is their fate, that they are consigned to a place not prepared for them—a place called into existence only out of necessity. Condemnation was not the plan of the Creator.

Before getting to the business at hand—how one might preach this text faithfully—one other point deserves attention. Neither goat nor sheep was aware of the presence of Jesus hidden in the form of “the least of these.” Ignorance on the part of goats is no surprise, but that the sheep have no awareness of Jesus lurking behind the neighbor should give us pause. One hears routinely about “serving Jesus” by doing deeds of kindness in the world. And so pious justification and motivation is provided for any number of possible social welfare activities in and through the church: from building houses in Mexico, to raking the widow’s leaves—it’s all done “for Jesus.” Popular piety and exegesis notwithstanding, our text does not support but actually contradicts this mindset. One serves the neighbor only for the sake of the neighbor; the single motivation necessary is the need of the neighbor. Sheep serve because they love their neighbor for his own sake, not because they perceive Jesus standing over the neighbor’s shoulder. So oblivious are they of the connection between their deeds of service and their
relationship to God through faith that it must be spelled out for them by their Lord. Yes, it is the distinction between the two kinds of righteousness.

Arriving at some practical points of application, two thoughts should stand out for the preacher (who should preach the text as written and not a sanitized version). First, Jesus expects his people to act like his people. Sheep take care of their neighbors. There is an expectation, even an obligation, for Christians to serve those in need (and not Jesus!), and this has nothing to do with election or salvation. The elect simply act like the elect. There is no room for complacency or apathy excused by misapplied or misunderstood gospel. Second, Christians can find remarkable comfort and encouragement in the reality that no deed of service, regardless how obscure, insignificant, or unappreciated is ever wasted or lost. Jesus keeps track.

Sermon specifics

**Goal:** To exhort Christ’s sheep to be busy in doing good works for the neighbor.

**Malady:** Even sheep can become complacent and direct their efforts in the wrong directions (working “at church” may well interfere with a sheep’s proper work as defined by her vocation).

**Means:** The Good Shepherd who elects and calls his sheep and separates them from the goats, showed us throughout his earthly ministry how to treat others—both sheep and goats.

Joel Biermann

Advent 1 • Isaiah 64:1–9 • November 27, 2011

The song goes that, after Deuteronomy, Isaiah is the most monotheistic book in the Old Testament. The confession of faith that the *Shema* (“Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”) sums up reminds the people of Israel that there is only one God who deserves their worship, namely, the Lord who saved them from the hands of their enemies. In the great exodus of old, the Lord displayed his mighty power against Pharaoh to deliver Israel, whom he had chosen out of mercy as his son.

With Isaiah, the monotheism of the Old Testament—firmly rooted in the experience of the exodus event—takes on a more pronounced universal eschatological orientation. The same Lord who delivered Israel from Egypt in the waters of the Red Sea will deliver the nations from darkness and iniquity through his servant’s suffering and exaltation. It will be a new exodus on a different scale. Not only Israel, but all the nations will know that the Lord is the only God. But such knowledge of God’s salvation is not accessible apart from his servant upon whom the Spirit rests.

Isaiah’s eschatological monotheism finds its fulfillment in Jesus, who is anointed with the Spirit to be our servant, to take upon himself our iniquities, to be a light unto the nations. If Jesus alone can deliver us, then he must be God—one with Yahweh. So we see NT writers ascribe to Jesus what Isaiah would only say of Yahweh. Jesus is the beginning and the end. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. The new exodus has come to us in Jesus. The Savior is Lord and God.
It is in this framework of the history of salvation, with Jesus at the center of the new eschatological event, that the text from Isaiah should be read. In psalm-like fashion, the writer begins with an eschatological picture of God’s mighty power and judgment, which soon leads to a confession of one’s sins before the Lord and opens the door to plea for his fatherly mercy. The Lord comes down from the heavens, the mountains quake at his fiery presence, and the nations tremble—fire and fear. The Lord has come to judge and reveal his power before Israel and the nations.

The same acts of the Lord can be seen at once as judgment and salvation. The waters of the exodus mean judgment for Pharaoh and his armies but salvation for God’s people. The suffering of Yahweh’s servant is condemnation for those who do not believe but eternal life for those who believe. The Lord, who comes down and makes the nations tremble, is also the one who acts on behalf of his people, mercifully meeting him who joyfully works righteousness and remembers his ways.

The text also places God’s people on the side of sinners. God’s son, Israel, whose unfaithfulness is well-known in the Bible, knows his sins all too well, that he deserves the wrath of God (v. 6). God’s judgment against sin is deeply felt. It is also an opportunity for confession. So the life of God’s people is one of repentance (v. 7). Help in the struggle against sin cannot come from within (v. 7b). Confessing one’s sin is a practical affirmation of the Shema. It lays on the table one’s idolatry, one’s rejection of the Lord’s ways. Sin reveals our practical polytheism, our false worship.

Now, the son Israel also acknowledges that only the one who saved his people from Egypt can rescue him from his enemies, so the unfaithful son calls out to his father for deliverance from iniquity (v. 8). Only the Father, who created for himself a people and chose Israel to be his son out of mercy, can hear his plea (v. 9). Confessing one’s sin is an eschatological affirmation of the Shema. It not only acknowledges that God can absolve us of our sins, but also expects in hope to receive such forgiveness from him. That is the evangelical side of the coin. In the new exodus, Jesus, the faithful servant-son, is our salvation. God is not finally a wrathful judge, but a merciful father. We can hope for a new day. Jesus makes this clear to us, revealing the depth of the Father’s love for us.

The text is an invitation to repentance. The words of Israel—his reverent fear of God and his mighty acts, his lament and hope in God’s deliverance—become ours today. The preacher can move the hearer of the psalm from the reality of divine judgment to the need for confession of sin and from the reality of fatherly mercy to the gift of absolution.

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

Advent 2 • Isaiah 40:1–11 • December 4, 2011

The Old Testament lesson for today does more than simply serve as the first lesson for this day; it summarizes the theme of Advent 2. Indeed, it summarizes the message of this entire season of the church year, and then it moves us to respond. It can be said that this remarkable passage is so complete that it summarizes the entire message.
of the Scriptures and of the Christian church. Surely that is why it is so well loved and so well known.

Isaiah, as God’s messenger called and commissioned by the Lord, knows those to whom he must speak. We, along with the people of Israel, are sinful human beings living in a sinful world. The deadly malignancy of sin has infected and affected everything and everyone: “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty (or “consistency”) is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass” (vv. 6–7).

The prophet knows who God is. He is a God of power and might who is offended by sin: “Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” (vv. 9–10). This is the God of law who expects obedience but also knows our human condition.

But Isaiah also knows that the creator of the ends of the earth and of the myriads of luminaries in the sky, the eternal and almighty God, is the God who “will tend his flock like a shepherd; will gather the lambs in his arms; . . . carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” This is the God of love, the God of gospel. This God forgives sins and builds up his people: “Comfort, comfort my people says your God . . . and cry to Jerusalem that her warfare (or time of service to sin) is ended . . . her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (vv. 1–3).

And now this God, our God, the one who comes, puts his church into action: “In the wilderness (of this world of sin) prepare the way of the Lord; make straight . . . a highway for our God” (v. 3). St. Peter, in today’s epistle, reminds us of our job when he says, “What sort of people ought you be . . . waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . . be diligent to be found by him without spot of blemish, and at peace” (2 Pt 3:11, 12, 14). We respond to that challenge because the Christ, whom John the Baptist proclaims in today’s gospel lesson, has baptized us with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:1-8), who puts us into action.

Our text is an eschatological message of the restoration of the people of God. It is the promise of divine deliverance. In the chapters leading up to our text, Isaiah predicts the Babylonian captivity for Judah, seventy-five years before the days of Babylonian supremacy. The prophecy of exile, which concludes chapter 39 (vv. 6–7), provides the transition point to this chapter’s announcement of salvation in the return from captivity.

Horace Hummel writes: “The historical return to Jerusalem after the Edict of Cyrus (538) is not only depicted in eschatological and cosmological colors, but the two are totally fused: the historical event is a type, “sacrament,” anticipation and proleptic realization of the ‘restoration of all things.’”

In our day we celebrate the eschaton—the now and not yet of the kingdom of God—where our Savior, who has come, comes to us daily and will come again. To a world filled with trial, trouble, and sorrow, the church is called to speak a word of comfort. Just as Joseph comforted his brothers and said to them, “God sent me before you
to preserve life” (Gn 45:5), even so today we tell the world how God sent Jesus to preserve our lives—that’s the message of Advent 2. God intends our good—our warfare is ended.

David Wollenburg

Endnote


Advent 3 • Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 • December 11, 2011

Behold Your Salvation

The Season of Advent presents unique challenges not only for the preacher but for the congregation as well. While shorter than Lent, the pastor and the people may find the challenges of Advent to be significant. How do you schedule special programs prepared by the day school, Sunday school, choir, and everything else during the month of December? By now, the Third Sunday in Advent, the pastor might welcome an opportunity to not preach. Yet this Sunday presents the preacher with a precious opportunity to aid the hearer, who is also a bit weary, to rejoice and “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation” (Zec 9:9, used in the Collect of the Day).

Earlier, the prophet Isaiah writes, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Is 40:1–2, read the previous Sunday). Now, this Sunday, the words of the one bringing this comfort give us a clearer understanding of both the need for this comfort and the certain truth that the Messiah delivers the very gifts he promised.

In the first verse (61:1), the one anointed for this purpose comes to bind the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to those held in captivity, and throw open the gates of the prison so that none would be held any longer. Comfort indeed becomes not just possible, not just a promise waiting for fulfillment, but becomes the “vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn” (61:2). This message comes with certainty because it comes from God.

Beginning with Thanksgiving and continuing through at least Christmas, much of what individuals and congregations do could quite possibly be accomplished by hitting “auto pilot” or by writing the same events and activities onto the current year’s calendar. Traditions can easily dictate what happens when, where, and how. Our desire is to produce a flawless, meaningful, holy season. Verse 3 might seem sorely out of place when we are trying so hard to plan and strive to accomplish every task ourselves. Now might not be the time we are most inclined to seek help. The anointed one comes offering to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He propels us far beyond the personal “to do” list. He offers to take our ashes and replace them with a beautiful headdress. Mourning turns to gladness. The weary spirit is replaced with gladness.
These are gifts to be received; we are incapable of producing them on our own.

The people of God are not destroyed but restored. God did not break the promise he made to Abraham but fulfilled it. As much as the people deserved death and destruction, God showed mercy. This gift not only preserves a people on this earth but guarantees life eternal. Having been clothed by him, having been covered in his righteousness (v. 10), we are as beautiful as a bridegroom, a priest, or a bride.

Now called “oaks of righteousness,” the people of God, his church, become the fertile seedbed for new growth. The destruction described in verse 4 is complete devastation, absolute death. The preacher here has the opportunity to show the sinner’s depravity. This is not the burning off of dross to leave pure silver. This is not the burning of worthless brush on a slash pile. Our works, our best efforts, our good intentions, do not make us strong, nor do we become ideal soil for new growth ourselves. Even the most well intended work on our part cannot withstand the heat of God’s judgment. When we are found so in need, so utterly helpless, the hand of God brings salvation and causes righteousness and praise to sprout.

The Third Sunday in Advent is not a time to purge the church of programs and traditions in an effort to cleanse his temple. Rather, this is a prime opportunity for the preacher to proclaim boldly and clearly the message of salvation to weary sinners. While many hope to do their best to craft a Christmas that is memorable and flawless, God comes with His message of perfection through his Son. At a time of year when the landscape surrounding most churches is bleak and hostile to life, the message of Isaiah 61 brings hope not for spring blossoms but for spirits made alive in the message of salvation as we prepare to celebrate his coming at Christmas.

William Wrede

Advent 4 • 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16 • December 18, 2011

The reading offers, in its OT context, a strong example of the truth that “God’s ways are higher and greater than our ways.” Specifically, the reading presents a powerful contrast between David’s (and Nathan’s) understanding of what the God of Israel planned to do for his people and their king on the one hand, and the intention of the Lord of Hosts for his people on the other hand. In addition to the truths that applied to the historical OT context of King David’s reign over Israel, the lesson leaps out into the future of the people of God. In even greater ways than David, we are invited to see the contrast between human plans and expectations, and the Creator God’s design for the entire world as it has been fulfilled—and will be fulfilled—in the one whom we know to be the greater Son of David.

The reading begins (vv.1–3) with King David living in his own royal palace, at peace and at rest from all his enemies. In an apparently pious and positive way, David perceives a serious inequity; the God of Israel has done much for him, but the king is allowing the Ark of the Covenant to be housed in the temporary structure of the tabernacle. David thinks that he sees the scope of God’s deliverance and favor, and now
he wants to give something back to the Lord God. He tells Nathan, and the prophet agrees. “The Lord is with you,” says the prophet. Neither the prophet nor the king, however, has any real understanding of how greatly the Lord intends to bless.

The “higher and greater” of God’s response comes in three parts. First (vv. 4–7), the Lord speaks to Nathan and through him, and the message is a “no” to David’s plan. David is not to build a house. Such a thing has neither happened nor been desired by God, not during the salvation in the exodus nor during the period of the judges. Second (vv. 8–9a), God reminds David of all that he has already done for him and, through him, for Israel. In grace, God took the shepherd-boy and made him prince over Israel. God has been with David, and, as verse 1 of the text has said, given rest and victory over all his enemies.

Third (vv. 9b–11), there will be more than David ever dreamed. David will have a name and a reputation as great as any on earth. Israel will finally have a place of security in which she can live, free from opposition and enemy. And greatest of all, the Lord will establish David’s rule and line in perpetuity; David’s house and David’s reign will endure before God, and for the sake of God’s people Israel, forever (v. 16).

Thus far the promise of this reading is in its OT, historical context. Although the appointed lection does not include verses 12–15, these verses are key to the way that the reading shoots out into the future. In the first place, as 1 Chronicles 22:6–10 and 27:6–7 make clear, Solomon is the son of David who begins to enact God’s great plans for God’s people through David’s rule. Yet, as even a cursory knowledge of the history of Israel instantly reveals, Solomon and all of the other Davidic rulers that follow in his flawed and sinful train only highlight the essential truth that this reading is proclaiming: God’s ways are higher and greater than anything mere mortals can imagine, desire, or achieve. God’s people need a prince, a king, one who can shepherd them and protect them from their enemies in a place that God himself has appointed for them. Neither Solomon nor any other mere mortal can be such a prince.

So in the fullness of time, the greater Son of David comes, and while David has a name with the great ones of the earth, Jesus receives the name that is above every other name. Jesus shares the divine name with the Father and the Spirit. As Israel for a time, in God’s economy, dwelt safely in the land, now wherever Jesus is found on this earth, there God’s people gather and are rooted and centered in him—even as they look forward to the day when the new heavens and earth become their place of safety forever. Now, the Son of David shepherds us, and, with the authority he has from God because he died for our sins and rose from the dead, he protects us from our enemies, from fear, and from anything that could separate us from the love of God that he has brought into the world. One day, the house of David and the Son of David will be established in all the creation, without remainder. On that day, God’s people will still, perhaps, be unable to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love, unable to understand that love that surpasses knowledge.

So what is this reading supposed to do for us? For David, the promises of God evoked praise and confidence (vv. 18–29). “Who am I? . . . And your name will be magnified forever!” (vv. 18, 26). Such a response would be a worthy result of a sermon
preached on this text. God’s ways are higher and greater than our ways. “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

Christmas Day • Isaiah 52:7–10 • December 25, 2011

Today, we wait for word of some important event by staying close to the television, the radio, the Internet, or to our cell phones. We sit in the waiting room of a surgical unit at the hospital, hoping expectantly for the sound of the doctor’s footsteps coming out of surgery to tell us that “all went well” and that our loved one will be just fine. Parents listen late at night for the sound of footsteps in the house telling them that their teenager has arrived home safely after a night with friends. Husbands wait close to a birthing room, listening for the cry of a newborn child. Grandparents wait for the call or even the photos or video clips of the new grandchild. Tweets, texts, phone calls, news reports, and even the sound of the doctor’s feet or the first cries of a newborn can bring some very good news. We pray for that kind of news, and we are delighted when it comes.

There was no Skype at the time of Isaiah, but there was a message system—the messenger who could be seen on the hillsides at some distance running to deliver the message. But Isaiah’s reference to the “beauty” of the feet of the runner have little to do with the messenger and have a whole lot to do with the beauty of the message.

In Isaiah’s time, the message was about the restoration of Israel, the end of their captivity in Babylon. Though doubts no doubt persisted in captivity about the power of the God of Israel, the soul-uplifting message of the messenger to God’s people and the central message of Isaiah in this text was “Your God (indeed) reigns.” What Isaiah was foreshadowing for us was the ultimate message of salvation and the eternal reign of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who brought an end to the captivity of sin. He is the one who brought to an end the bondage experienced by those with no hope because of their alienation from God. He brought freedom—freedom from the eternal consequences of sin and freedom to experience life here to the fullest and life forever with him in heaven. Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus reigns, and through faith in him, we share in his kingdom!

Those who bring this message of salvation by grace through faith for the sake of the reigning Jesus Christ can be welcomed with great joy. But it is, of course, their message that brings the greatest joy. Isaiah 52:7 is a familiar passage: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” The verses following verse 7 simply underscore the joy associated with the fact that the God of Israel reigns. Paul in Romans 10:15 quotes Isaiah in talking about the importance of those who proclaim the “good news.” (“And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”)

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A temptation may be to glamorize the messenger. We may even border on that at the Seminary as we talk about how important pastors are and what a glorious task is theirs. “How beautiful is a pastor coming to minister,” we might say. To be sure, we celebrate God’s goodness in calling a man into the pastoral ministry, but the truly beautiful thing is the message he delivers.

As a pastor, you are called to be a messenger, with the message being paramount. And it is only truly effective if the person receiving the message is aware of how valuable the “good news” is. Thus, two messages are essential when working with this text: 1) captivity (bad news) and 2) the reign of Jesus Christ and the freedom that results (good news).

For Isaiah and Israel, the captivity experienced in Babylon was real. It hurt. It was destructive. It all but wiped out their peace, happiness, and hope for the future. But the return to Zion was glorious! The message of God reigning was greeted with great joy, and, as Isaiah makes clear in verse 10 of the text, God’s reign and salvation are for all nations.

We can identify with the Babylonian captives. Sin (captivity) is still real in our lives. It is destructive. It can bring so much hurt and obliterate true happiness. It wipes out any hope we may have for forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption. We may be sorry for what we have done, but we can’t fix the problem. We’re captive. And then along comes a messenger with the beautiful message of God’s gift of a Savior, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection bring to us forgiveness, peace, happiness, freedom, and hope through faith. We can know for sure that the Lord Jesus reigns. And that message is, indeed, beautiful!

Paul Devantier

Christmas 1 • Isaiah 61:10–62:3 • January 1, 2012

Sometimes Christians find the prophetic writings strange territory because those writings seem to be an unending boiling and churning of divine wrath and horrifying judgment. The New Testament seems to be much more familiar territory in terms of knowledge and content. In reality, there is plenty of judgment in the New Testament also—but that’s not our topic here. Our topic deals with much more positive, downright spectacular, visions in the prophetic writings of what the future will hold after God’s judgment has come (defeat and exile), after God’s people repent and look to God again, and when God forgives and establishes his people once again. (Doesn’t this simply sound like the narrative form of our dogmatic category of law-gospel?)

Notice how the vision in our pericope jumps from one exuberant image to another. Perhaps the most dominant is the picture of bride and bridegroom, which describes not only the joy in Israel’s heart (61:10), but also the renewed relationship between Israel and God (62:5)—no wonder Paul exults on this imagery too (Eph 5:21–33). There is, in addition, the joy of new, festive clothing (61:10), the “crown of splendor,” and the “royal diadem” (62:3). God’s salvation and his renewing Spirit
turns shame and disgrace (61:7) into righteousness (61:11, 62:1–2), which in turn leads “praise (to) spring up before all the nations” (61:11).

In the midst of this splendidiferous vision is yet another image which this homiletical study focuses on, namely the “new name” mentioned in 62:2 and expanded in 62:4—yes, we will tack verses 4 and 5 onto the assigned pericope. What follows is a train of thoughts moving from names generally to the “new name” of this pericope to the “name that is above all names” (Phil 2:9) to the name into which we are baptized (Mt 28:19), and finally to the names “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rv 21:27).

N.B. 1) There are places indicated in the study below where the preacher is invited to insert his own [surname] or [given name] or [nickname]. 2) This homiletic study follows the principle that one image/theme is enough for one sermon, and leaves other themes for future sermons. 3) The expanded skeleton that follows is intentionally brief, so there is room to supplement it with examples, expansions, or applications pertinent to the occasion or congregation.

What’s In a Name

A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing. Our name identifies who we are; our name describes who we are; our name determines who we are. Our name and our self are inseparable.

Like the (give examples of surnames in the congregation), I carry a surname too, a name I had—or more correctly, a name that had me—before I was born. A name I was born into…a name that carried family identity and tradition from generations…a name that brings me into the world in a set of relations and relationship. [Surname] is a name I may carry with pride/embarrassment/resentment, but I do carry it—or does it carry me? A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing.

Like all of you, I also carry a given name. I am not just a [surname] but a [given name surname]. And the [given name] about me is me in my uniqueness, to mold and shape, to mark identity within the [surname] clan. I can share my [surname] with many, but my [given name] I entrust mostly to special friends, even more so my [nickname].

But I am these two together. My name is not just a username or a password; my name is me, part of me, inseparable from me. Pity the person who suffers amnesia, and can’t remember his name or who he is.

A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing. What a life-changing, revolutionary step it would be for a person to change his/her name. Actually, folks of the male persuasion don’t often do that, nor do they appreciate what a commitment it is for a young woman to set aside her surname and take on her husband’s when they marry. I can understand the reluctance of a woman to set aside who she was as though she isn’t that person any more. I can also understand the desire of some couples to join surnames, as unwieldy as that can be.

A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing. What an indignity and shame it must have been for Judah when the superpowers of the day (Egypt or Babylon) simply replaced kings at their will and renamed them: Eliakim to Jehoiakim; Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 23:34, 24:17). It isn’t that those names were bad in themselves, but
they were imposed by intruders. The kings couldn’t be themselves, but had to be what Egypt or Babylon called them to be.

On the other hand, when the Lord redeems Israel—from slavery and exile, from singing only sad songs by the rivers of Babylon (Ps 137), from being ridiculed, outcast, alien, and hopeless—one of the signs of joy and salvation that he grants them is new names. Gone are the names Deserted and Desolate. The Lord who redeems them gives them not just a name for the future but a name with a future, indeed a name with a present—not a name foisted on Israel, nor a name of ridicule, but a name given in love and in promise (Is 62:4): Hephzibah (my delight is in her) and Beulah (married, [my] bride)—not catch names in our day, but easy on the ear and heart for those exiles. Those names are to be heard, Israel’s joy and God’s love are to be seen by “all nations,” and praise will redound to the name of the Lord.

A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing, especially in the hand of God, for God loves to give new names, as he did when he made Abram into Abraham, Sarai into Sarah, Saul into Paul. He instructed Joseph to “give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). The greatest of Christmas gifts is that name above all names, the name at which all knees shall bow, the name “given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). He who gave his life for us gives his name to us. He invites us to be baptized into that name (Mt 28:19). He calls his name upon us, and we bear/name/proclaim/praise/live the name of Christ, a name, a hope, and a joy we could never inherit or make for ourselves. Bearing his name we offer him our birth names, as we offer all parts of our life, to be washed, redeemed, and retooled, and by his grace “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rv 21:27).

A name is a marvelous, mysterious thing. Our name identifies who we are; our name describes who we are; our name determines who we are. Our name and our self are inseparable. And we are Christ’s.

Henry Rowold

Baptism of our Lord • Genesis 1:1–5 • January 8, 2012

Perhaps no passage bears as much gravitas—and controversy—as Genesis 1:1. In our context, the text will immediately bring to mind the modernist “science vs. faith” controversy. The philosophical and cultural issues that prevent hearing this text are many, on both sides. And the exegetical difficulties pile up in this short section; the meaning of אָרָּב; the relationship of v. 1 to v. 2; the referent of הַחוּרְם; how day and night can exist before there is sun and moon, etc. Such matters are best left to a commentary. Creedal Christians have learned with the faithful of generations past to confess creatio ex nihilo by the Triune God. Rather than explanation of the Hebrew or “defense” of the Bible, what the baptized crave is good news. How does God speaking, creating for his purposes and glory, bring his kingdom?

The beginning point is God. We westerners have been shaped to think that all things begin and end with the individual. I make my own choices; I have my own free
will; I choose what to believe or to believe nothing at all; I can make the world a better place; my destiny is in my own hands. I am the subject of the verbs. The scriptural narrative, however, has a different subject. “God created.” “The Spirit of God was hovering.” “God said.” And creation is the object, the recipient. Genesis 1 puts us in our place, a place we need to relearn.

In our generation, we no longer believe that creation is “good.” As I write this, the news has been filled with earthquakes and hurricanes that caused fear and devastation on the east coast of the U.S.; as you prepare a sermon no doubt there will have been a “natural disaster” in the news recently. Reports of global warming cause fear. The creation is groaning, subject to futility. Rather than tending the good creation as the vocation given us by the creator (Gn 1:26), we battle against it, and it battles against us. Sin wants to place us as the subject of the story; we live in rebellion against God.

Nor does our generation believe in a God who creates all things, for we want no gods to make claims on us. And so we make lesser gods in our image, as the gods of all nations always are and always will be. No longer do we call on Poseidon to reign over the sea for us, nor Isis to rule over nature on our behalf. We are too advanced for such superstition. Instead, we have made ourselves gods, for we can rule over creation with our knowledge. Cure all illness, create endless energy, and hold back the seas themselves. But death is never cheated; in our reign over this creation we’ve made antibiotics so common that simple bacteria have mutated into killers beyond our control. We’ve stuffed our bodies so full of chemicals that we seem to have produced a generation of children with tragic, untreated dysfunction of mind and body. We’ve dammed and leveed rivers, which nevertheless yearly spill over. Our oil runs dry (or onto the beaches), tsunamis drown our nuclear plants, and coal scars both our land when we dig it up and our lungs when we burn it up. “Science” is not the problem—you are likely writing your sermon on a laptop produced by scientists and powered by electricity generated using gas, oil, water, or sun. But we’ve taken God’s gifts of science and knowledge and made them our masters. We are out of place.

But the first day of creation was not the last time that God spoke. He did not leave us to our own gods. He spoke to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets—words of promise. He spoke in the re-invasion of his creation in his Son’s baptism, announcing him as Son and proclaiming the kingdom (Mk 1:4–11; 14–15). He spoke in claiming us as his children in our baptism, burying us with him in a baptism like his so that we could be raised in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:1–11). And now when we look at this creation, we hear a voice that thunders over the waters and breaks the cedars of Lebanon. Yet we do not fear this voice, because with this voice he has claimed us. And so we ascribe glory to him (Ps 29).

It all rests on a word, on a promise. If God is not powerful enough to create the world, then neither is he powerful enough to redeem. If no Creator, then no Savior, and no Spirit who cries out in us. But with the Creator comes salvation, wholeness, restoration, new creation. Genesis 1 puts us in our place. And what a “good” place it is.

Jeffrey Kloha
This text comes from a time in the history of the people of Israel when “the word of the Lord was rare” (v. 1), and on the heels of the time of the Judges when “all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Jgs 21:25). In fact, in chapter two of 1 Samuel we learn that Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are doing what is right in their own eyes, and the Lord has passed judgment upon them for doing so. This will put young Samuel in a precarious position.

There is a hymn in the Lutheran Hymnal, “Speak, O Lord, Thy Servant Heareth” (TLH 296), that is based on the call of Samuel and focuses the worshipper on how wonderful and powerful the Word of the Lord really is in the life of the Christian.

These hymn verses (1 and 3) portray, quite well, what Samuel is beginning to learn and understand in the first part of the text (1 Sm 3:1–10). Namely, God’s Word is a precious gift that leads and feeds its hearers unto everlasting life. That Word is true. It is powerful. It does what it says. The people of God depend on that Word, and the Spirit of God working through it, for salvation, instruction, direction, and preservation in the one true faith. Thus, should the preacher decide to concentrate on verses 1–10 of 1 Samuel 3, then a very good sermon could be written and delivered regarding the blessing that the Word of the Lord is, especially as that Word is “enfleshed” in the person of Jesus Christ. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son… [who is]…the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being…” (Heb 1:1–3).

Verses 11–20 of 1 Samuel 3, however, show us the other side of receiving the Word of the Lord. That is, the challenging, difficult, unsettling, upsetting, and potentially dangerous consequences of having and sharing that Word. It is one thing to have and hold the Word of the Lord. It is quite another thing to speak it, share it, and proclaim it in ways that people can actually hear and understand, especially when that Word causes the “the ears of everyone who hears it to tingle.”

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” It was the right thing for Samuel to say and do, and the message Samuel heard had all the direct force of truth. He knew he had received it directly from God. But it was also a word he might well have wished he had not heard, for it immediately tested his strength of character and resolve. The text tells us that when morning rolled around, Samuel “was afraid to tell Eli the vision.”

This fear is common among the people of God and their preachers as they seek to bear the Word of the Lord to each other and out into the world. God’s Word is not just sweetness and light. It is a fire, the Psalmist says. It melts the earth if it must; it abides forever; it creates weal and woe; it is what will never fail. Against it, who can stand? Today that Word can be very unpopular inside and outside the church, and sometimes, perhaps too often, we do not speak or live its truth in love, as we ought.

“The trouble with deep belief,” author Donald Miller says in his book, Blue Like Jazz, “is that it costs something. And there is something inside of me, some selfish beast of a subtle thing, that doesn’t like the truth at all because it carries responsibility,
and if I actually believe these things I have to do something about them . . . I used to say it was important to tell people about Jesus, but I never did. [My friend] Andrew kindly explained that if I do not introduce people to Jesus, then I don’t believe Jesus is an important person. It doesn’t matter what I say.”

Saying and doing the word of truth, then, and saying and doing it in love, is the life and lifestyle into which God called Samuel. It is also the life and lifestyle into which he calls us over and over again. This is who we are, and this is where we stand.

But we do not stand alone. Whenever and wherever the Word of the Lord is spoken and lived out, there the Word made flesh is also present and active.

William Utech

Epiphany 3 • Jonah 3:1–5, 10 • January 22, 2012

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me’” (Jon 3:1–2). But Jonah was not happy. In fact, Jonah was most displeased (4:1–3), disillusioned, and determined not to be the instrument of the Lord’s mercy to that loathsome city, to the horrible human inhabitants of Nineveh, who unquestionably deserved to get what was otherwise coming to them. So Jonah packed his bags and looked for the first opportunity to get as far away from the presence and the purposes of the Lord as he possibly could.

Pick someone who really deserves to get what’s coming to him, a poor excuse for a human being who really makes your skin crawl, who causes good Christian people to rightly recoil in horror. Fill an ancient metropolis with one hundred and twenty thousand (4:11) makes-your-skin-crawl and causes-you-to-recoil-in-horror people like that, give or take a serial killer, a pedophile, and a rapist or two, and what you have is a shamelessly idolatrous Nineveh, reveling, insatiably rejoicing in its wanton capacity to invent ever new ways of sinking into an ever more deplorable depravity, making itself all the more deserving of descent into the depths of Sheol. What you have is Nineveh. But look who ends up later being hurled into the depths, not the Ninevites, but the prophet of Almighty God (1:15).

Sometimes God’s love for the loveless, for those who deserve it not, seems ever so adorable. Good for God! What a good God he is! Isn’t the God of the forlorn wonderful? Sometimes God seems unfailingly endearing, but sometimes he and his ways are unnerving, unsettling. Sometimes God’s love for the loveless is nothing short of shocking. You mean he loves them all? You mean he actually earnestly longs to extend his love and forgiveness to all? Even the ugliest of the ugly, the most reprehensible of them all? All of them? Really?

So Jonah “rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD” (1:3) because he could not fathom, could in no way embrace, that kind of a God. So he rose to flee, so he rose to refuse and abandon it all, and, in doing so, he joined those that he loathed—deserving of Sheol. So Jonah was hurled into the depths, so that he might know, so that he might first be redeemed, so that he might repent and believe, so that
he might come to his senses, or at least so that he might come to see that God's way must have its day.

“And the LORD spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land” (2:10), so that “the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, [OK, one more time] ‘Arise, go to Nineveh’ . . . So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD” (3:1–3), not because he especially wanted to, mind you, not because he now possessed the heart of his God for the Ninevites. Have you noticed how often it is that the will of God takes us in directions that we never would have chosen for ourselves? Jonah goes, as all must at times go, not because he understands why, not because he knows how it is sure to go, not even because in his heart of hearts he sympathizes, but because God’s way must have its day.

So Jonah “called out . . . and the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them” (3:4–5). And “when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” (3:10). That’s right. He did not do it. And so we rejoice. For in this we see not betrayal but the lengths to which our God is willing to go for the good, the bad, and, yes, even the ugly. For the Lord our God is “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (4:2). If his love is for some, his love is for all, the appalling, the abhorrent, all. Thanks be to God, for it matters not who the sinner is, God’s way has had its day.

Bruce Schuchard

Epiphany 4 • Deuteronomy 18:15–20 • January 29, 2012

When considering each text for preaching, pastors are called upon to ponder how the law of that text is speaking to the pastor as well as to the parishioners who will hear his sermon. In this case, the law of verse 20 (“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die”) is speaking most seriously, most directly to the pastor. This text may allow the preacher to note the connections between the Office of the Pastoral Ministry and the prophets and apostles. The complication of this text may be how to help the listener hear and appreciate the law that is speaking less directly to them so that they can hear the gospel for them.

We live in a country with hundreds of different denominations and their teachings. Many of them say doctrine is not all that important; what is most important to them is how you feel about your Savior, not the specifics of what Jesus and the Apostles taught (despite what Jesus says about the importance of teaching in the Great Commission, Mt 28:20). Pastors may want to make it clear to their listeners that it is good for them to feel their faith, to live out their faith with passion and compassion, but that faith is a result of the teachings of Jesus and his prophets and apostles.

Some Christians believe that we in the LCMS over-emphasize correct doctrine. We probably do focus on doctrine more than any other major denomination in the

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US. We have the Book of Concord in which the most important of our doctrines are spelled out in great detail. Many other American Christians think we are “legalistic” because we practice things like “close communion” or “church discipline” or (you pick a topic that may be most relevant to your congregational setting). But practicing correct doctrine is really not legalistic, it’s not LAW; correct doctrine is being faithful to the gospel. Because Christ has given his life for us, we want to keep his name holy by teaching the Word of God in all its truth and purity—and living holy lives according to it (Luther in the Small Catechism: “How is God’s name kept holy?)

In 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament, we are given specific admonitions to beware false teaching and false teachers/prophets. (For example see Mt 7:15, Mk 13:22, Acts 20:28ff, Eph 4:14–15, 1 Tm 1:3, Heb 13:9, 2 Pt 2:1, 1 Jn 4:1). The first temptation to sin was when the serpent said to Eve: “Did God really say?”

Pastors feel the pressure even more because God’s word calls upon us to not just proclaim his Word rightly and be faithful teachers of the truth, but to do so with a spirit of humility, love, and gentleness (see 2 Tm 2: 24-25, Gal 6:1, Eph 4:15, 1 Pt 3:15). The whole church, laity included, is called to be loving and gentle.

How do we know if something is really a false prophecy, or someone is a false prophet or false teacher? That is why it is so important for the laity to know God’s word as well, especially as summarized in Luther’s Small and Large Catechism. If you or some future pastor, or some TV preacher or teacher speaks on behalf of God, pastors (you may want to speak in the first person if you use this) hope that normally laity will be able to hear the incorrect teaching (heterodoxy or heresy) and, gently/humbly, correct the pastor or teacher. In the case of a heterodox TV or radio or internet preacher or teacher, we hope you would just turn them off. For hundreds of years various preachers have been predicting specific dates for the end of the world (see p. 307 of The Lutheran Study Bible for a list of the most prominent). Jesus wants us to be watchful for his second coming (Lk 21:36, 1 Pt 4:7), but he explicitly states that no one knows the day or the hour (Mt 24:36 and 25:13).

So who was the new prophet that Moses was prophesying would come? The LORD sent many faithful prophets to his Old Testament people, men like Samuel and Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Malachi. But Peter makes explicit who the ultimate prophet was in his sermon at the temple in Acts 3. (He makes this most explicit in verse 22, but the preacher will need to select a few other verses from that sermon to make a direct connection to Jesus for the listeners.) On the holy mountain of the Transfiguration, his Father’s voice repeated Moses by saying “Listen to him” (Mk 9:7). Other verses that make a direct Moses-Jesus connection that the preacher may wish to include are John 1:17, 1:45, and 5:46. This new prophet leads us, by grace and truth, to the greater Promised Land by his cross and resurrection.

Rick Marrs
“The Fowlest Sermon”

Historical Context

At one time, during the Davidic/Solomonic era, Israel had been on top of the ancient Near Eastern world. The nation appeared to have everything (see Romans 9:4–5). The ironic twist about Israel’s history, however, is that the oppressed in Egypt became oppressors of one another in the promised land. In many ways, especially beginning with Solomon, Jerusalem became the new Egypt, and everything began to fall apart.

In 587 BC Yahweh’s judgment was to orchestrate the Babylonian exile. Despondent and despairing, those stuck in Babylon lost all hope. Yet Yahweh still “remembered his covenant and relented according to the abundance of his loyal love” (Ps 106:46). Isaiah 40–55 announces this amazing act of grace!

Context in Isaiah 40–55

In Isaiah 40:1–11 Yahweh takes up the question, “Will you save us?” Now in Isaiah 40:12–31 he addresses the question, “Can you save us?” In both cases, he answers with a resounding “yes!”

Comments on the Text

Isaiah 40:22: The Qal participle הַנְּהָיָה (“the one who is dwelling”) is the first of many participles in Isaiah 40–55 that affirm Yahweh’s ongoing activity in the world (e.g., Is 40:26, 28–30; 44:24–28; 46:10–11). His lordship is not that of a deist watchmaker who sets the world ticking and then walks away.

Isaiah 40:24: The verb Isaiah employs denoting “to blow” (נָחַש) only appears again in Exodus 15:10. In this way, Israel is called to look at the Babylonian superpower from the perspective of what Yahweh did to the superpower Egypt at the Red Sea. In doing so, the exiles will realize that there is only one real superpower, Yahweh!

Isaiah 40:26: Since the Babylonians were astrologers and much of their intellectual and religious life was tied to astral worship (Is 47:13), the prophet maintains that stars do not rule history. Yahweh created every star and calls each one by name (cf. Ps 147:4). And, if he can recall each star by its name, how could he ever forget Israel (Is 49:14) whom he also calls by name (Is 43:1)?

Isaiah 40:28: The title—“God of eternity”—appears only here in the OT. In Isaiah 40–55, Yahweh’s word is also everlasting (Is 40:8), as is his salvation (Is 45:17; 51:6), righteousness (Is 51:8), covenant love (Is 54:8) and the Davidic covenant he cuts with all people (Is 55:3). Contrast this with Babylon’s claim, “I am forever” (Is 47:7). How blasphemous!

Isaiah 40:31: Waiting on Yahweh involves three related ideas: (1) the humble admission that there are no other options, (2) the refusal to engage in frantic worry, and (3) the confidence that Yahweh will come through in his time as he has promised.
Homiletical Development of the Sermon

This is a fowl sermon, but the fowl is not spelled F-O-U-L. That kind of foul is reserved for baseballs that don’t stay between chalk lines. This fowl is spelled F-O-W-L as in, you guessed it, birds.

People in the ancient Near East often used birds to make a point. In Exodus 19:4 Yahweh tells Moses: “You have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings.” Outside of the OT, and during Isaiah’s time, the Assyrian King Sennacherib says he shut up Hezekiah “in the midst of Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage.” So in this sermon birds will also be used to make a point or two.

Isaiah is addressing those who knew of the Exodus Eagle’s steadfast love demonstrated when he delivered their fathers from bondage in Egypt. He is also addressing those who would know of the bird-cage of captivity, bound by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Here, use ideas from the historical context detailed above.

Then use different birds to discuss Israel’s sins that brought about the exile. For example a peacock is consumed with self (e.g., Zion’s women in Is 3:16–26; 4:1); a chicken grubs for worms and lives the low life (e.g., Is 5:20–23); and a crow crows and makes loud and obnoxious noises but doesn’t accomplish anything (e.g., Is 1:10–15).

We can be dirty birds as well. Connect Israel’s sins with ours.

What does Isaiah do? He points us to Yahweh. See the context of Isaiah 40:12–31 above and draw pertinent ideas from the textual notes.

Yahweh’s word in Isaiah 40:31 is “wait.” Eagles soar only as they position themselves high on a rock and wait and when the wind comes they are borne aloft. The power comes from the wind beneath their wings.

In the season of Epiphany, we stand after the Servant’s birth and baptism and await his crucifixion, resurrection and glorification. He does all of this so that the wind may blow. “For the wind blows wherever it pleases,” Jesus once told Nicodemus (Jn 3:8). And it pleases the wind to blow in the gospel preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and the sacraments administered in accordance with the divine Word. The wind blows where Jesus is forgiving sins.

What is the result? Dare I say it, a fowl life? But this is not any ordinary fowl. We are free to soar on wings like eagles. Eagles have the most powerful eyesight of any bird (see Job 39:29). From high in the sky an eagle can see a rabbit two miles away. The Hebrew writer speaks of another eagle, ol’ eagle eye Moses (see Heb 11:27).

Eagles are the most committed of all birds (see Dt 32:11). The eagle will never forsake her young. That’s why eagle Paul can speak of radical commitment from his prison in Rome (see 2 Tm 4:7).

Eagles stay fresh and energized (see Ps 103:5). Every day the eagle preens himself, breathing upon his feathers because over the night they become matted and stuck to each other. See Paul’s discussion on daily renewal in 2 Corinthians 4:16.

No wonder the proverb writer is so awed with the eagle (Prv 30:18–19). We are no longer dirty birds (see 2 Cor 5:17). All this is not by might and not by power, but by Yahweh’s Spirit that blows even now loving and freeing and lifting us in the name of Jesus to take us out of exile and toward our heavenly promised land.

Reed Lessing
BOOK REVIEWS
One can get lost in the Bonhoeffer maze.

The depth, complexity, nuance, and paradox of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thought;¹ his “eclectic mixture” of Continental Protestant academic theology, “confessional Lutheranism, biblical Pietism, moderate Catholicism,”² and the middle-class intellectualism (bildungsbürgertum) of his day; his truncated lifespan (1906–1945) with disparate stages of his faith-life’s journey,³ including imprisonment; the fragmentary and incomplete nature of many of his writings; his appropriation by an incredibly varied array of theologians and theologies: all these factors have led to a Bonhoeffer who seemingly belongs, at one and the same time, to just about everyone yet no one in particular.⁴

Within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) there are complaints that he has been “hijacked by too many unorthodox theologies… and weird admirers.”⁵ Meanwhile, those more inclined to the theological left are up in arms because American evangelicals like best-selling author Eric Metaxas have “co-opted” Bonhoeffer for themselves. Clifford J. Green, Executive Director of the Works project and editor of several of its volumes, writes in a review of Metaxas’s Bonhoeffer⁶ in The Christian Century that Bonhoeffer has been, yes, “hijacked.”⁷

This is but a sample of the Bonhoeffer firestorm that rages across and within “conservative” and “liberal” camps regarding his life, theology, and home. So can we rescue Bonhoeffer from the hijackers? Can we even identify who the real hijackers are? To where does the maze lead? To whom does Dietrich Bonhoeffer belong?

Overview of Editorial Work

As with most things Bonhoeffer, the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English edition (DBWE), finds its inspiration and origin in the work of Eberhard Bethge, well-known as Bonhoeffer’s former student, best friend, and relative. After overseeing the publish-
The Cost of Discipleship, Ethics, and Letters and Papers from Prison, Bethge also published several early compilations of various Bonhoeffer documents, along with his magisterial biography which first appeared in English in 1970, with a revised and complete edition in 2000.8 The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke series, German edition, with Bethge and others as editors, began to appear in 1986 and the last volume was published in 1998, with an index in 1999.9 DBWE is basically an English translation of this series, with the first volume published already in 1996.10

DBWE is nearing completion and will comprise 16 volumes, of which 13 are now available. Volume 11 will be published in 2011, with volumes 14 and 15 appearing by early 2012. In fact, the English Language Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society will host a conference in New York in November 2011 celebrating the completion of the project.11

Interestingly, though DBWE now already spans 13 volumes and well over 6500 pages, Bonhoeffer himself wrote relatively little that was directly intended for publication: The Cost of Discipleship (vol. 4), Life Together and Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible (vol. 5),12 with the latter two accounting for less than 125 pages combined. The rest of the DBWE corpus includes students’ notes from various lectures (e.g., the Christology lectures commonly known as Christ the Center, as well as Creation and Fall),13 incomplete treatises (e.g., Ethics),14 academic work (e.g., Sanctorum Communio, his 1927 doctoral dissertation [lic.], and Act and Being, his 1930 habilitation thesis, both of which were then subsequently submitted for publication),15 letters and papers (e.g., Letters and Papers from Prison),16 sermons, poems, and other material; even some letters and notes of his associates are included in DBWE.

The volumes are arranged in a bi-focal chronological order. The first eight volumes consist of his “classic” works in the order in which he wrote them, beginning with Sanctorum Communio (vol. 1) through Letters and Papers from Prison (vol. 8). The second half of the DBWE is arranged in chronological order according to Bonhoeffer’s own life, with personal and circular letters, diary entries, essays, lectures, sermons, liturgies, catechetical lessons, addresses, presentations, notes, meditations, and reports from the young Bonhoeffer of 1918–1927 (vol. 9) through the conspiracy and his imprisonment, 1940–1945 (vol. 16).17 As is often the case with a project such as this, the publication order has not been numerical. The first to be published was volume 5, Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible (1996), followed by Act and Being (vol. 2) that same year, and then Creation and Fall (vol. 3, 1997); Sanctorum Communio (vol. 1, 1998); Fiction from Tegel Prison (vol. 7, 2000);18 Discipleship (vol. 4, 2001); The Young Bonhoeffer (vol. 9, 2003); Ethics (vol. 6, 2005); Conspiracy and Imprisonment (vol. 16, 2006); London (vol. 13, 2007);19 Barcelona, Berlin, New York (vol. 10, 2008);20 Berlin (vol. 12, 2009); and, most recently, Letters and Papers from Prison (vol. 8, 2010). As mentioned, volumes 11 (Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932), 14 (Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937), and 15 (Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940) are all expected within a year.

The DBWE is painstakingly thorough. It is a scholar’s and historian’s delight. Each volume includes editorial footnotes throughout (presented uniformly with
the exception of vol. 5); a detailed chronology; a bibliography of literature used by Bonhoeffer, as well as that consulted by the editors, and, as pertinent, that mentioned by Bonhoeffer’s correspondents; and indexes by scripture, subject, and names, including (except in volumes 1–5) brief biographical sketches. Each book commences with the editor’s introduction to the English edition and closes with the editor’s afterword to the original German edition. The pagination from the German edition appears in the outer margin of each page. Significantly, since the German edition, more material—specifically, correspondence—has been discovered and included in the *DBWE*. Also, due to recent historical scholarship regarding dating and historical context, some material has been moved around in comparison to previous editions. For example, material included in earlier editions of Ethics—such as writings on church and state, personal and objective ethics, and the first use of the law—now appears not in volume 6 but in *DBWE* 16, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945*. These are documents that appeared as appendices in the earliest publications of Ethics and/or were originally position papers drafted for specific historical circumstances. For those readers—and even reviewers—accustomed to previous editions of Ethics, this may be confusing, but is literally and historically accurate. Despite the inevitable, though relatively rare, error (e.g., some page numbers in the “Contents,” several errors in inter-volume cross-referencing, etc.), the editors are to be highly commended for exceptionally outstanding work with a monumental and difficult task.

Meanwhile, the theological perspectives of the editors are manifested in various ways. For instance, Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., general editor from 1993–2004, explains in his foreword that “translators…sought… to present Bonhoeffer’s words in a manner that is sensitive to issues of language and gender. Consequently, accurate translation has removed sexist formulations that have been introduced inadvertently or unnecessarily into earlier English versions of his works. In addition, translators and editors generally have employed gender-inclusive language…” However, beginning with vol. 16 (2004), the first for which Victoria J. Barnett also served as general editor with Floyd, as she did exclusively thereafter, the inclusive language policy was changed and the formulation “sexist formulations” does not appear in the foreword. Nonetheless, at least in volumes 1–7 and sometimes elsewhere, the previous policy results in a habit of not translating divine masculine pronouns, but rather substituting “God” for Bonhoeffer’s original “he, his, him,” etc. This unnatural rendering becomes, at best, tedious for the reader, not to mention that it is an inaccurate depersonalizing of the first person of the Trinity. Furthermore, the editors sometimes seem embarrassed by Bonhoeffer’s orthodoxy. For example, on Bonhoeffer’s use of the phrase “Pauline Psalms,” an editorial footnote in *Prayerbook* seems to quote favorably from Karl Holl. Holl was commenting on Martin Luther, but the clear implication is that his words are applicable to Bonhoeffer too: “Luther bases his interpretation on the conviction that the Bible in all its parts has one and the same meaning. Under this constraint, he points out that what had become for him the most significant feature of the Bible, the Pauline Gospel, was also integral to the Psalms. He did not realize that he was, thereby, doing very serious violence to the text. The Psalms, indeed, preach self-justification as does the entire Old
Testament…” Furthermore, the editor claims “[f]ew exegetes today would agree… with Bonhoeffer’s attempt to interpret the psalms of wrath in terms of the Christian gospel’s insistence [sic] on forgiving one’s enemies.”26 The problem, it seems, is with Bonhoeffer’s christocentric reading of Scripture, along with its concomitant understanding of justification as the heart and center of the entire Bible. Bonhoeffer, however, insists on having the doctrine of justification as the touchstone and, thereby, interprets these psalms in light of Christ’s forgiveness toward all. Finally, in his introduction to Ethics, Green addresses Bonhoeffer’s explicit description of abortion as “murder.”27 Green writes:

In Nazi Germany, abortion was illegal, but the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases was amended in 1936 to make compulsory the abortion of ‘genetically unfit’ fetuses up to six months in utero. Such Nazi ‘genetic engineering’ is clearly in Bonhoeffer’s sights: “this is nothing but murder.” To be sure, that is not the only circumstance and motive he addresses in his one brief paragraph on abortion. It is very problematic, however, to extrapolate from that context a general principle on abortion that would apply to quite different cases and contexts.28

This recasting of Bonhoeffer’s position obfuscates the fact that he directly addresses the reality that there may indeed be “various motives,” but that these do not “confuse” or “change the fact of murder.” He even engages positively “the sharp rejection by the Catholic church of killing the child in the mother’s womb [even] when the mother’s life is in danger…. The life of the mother is in God’s hands; the life of the child, however, is arbitrarily extinguished.”29 Moreover, in the very same work Bonhoeffer clearly affirms the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms and the state’s proper role in the affairs of human life.30 Thus, while there is much to praise and appreciate, one must read with discernment not only Bonhoeffer, but also the editorial analyses and applications.

All this is perhaps not surprising considering that the volumes are not edited from a specifically “Missouri” point of view, and not necessarily even from a specifically Lutheran perspective, as both general editors and the majority of volume editors and co-editors are not confessors of the Augustana.31 Connections with the World Council of Churches and Union Seminary (New York) abound. Bonhoeffer’s impact, interpretation, and application have been extensive across the denominational spectrum and across differing confessions, and the series reflects this range.

Letters and Papers from Prison

The latest volume to be released is DBWE 8, Letters and Papers from Prison. These classic jail cell writings have been used as the main scaffolding in constructing the Bonhoeffer maze. Indeed, perhaps the most controversial aspect of Bonhoeffer is his musings on so-called non-religious language. His reflections on a “non-religious interpretation of Christianity” have contributed more to the firestorm and caused more debate than maybe any other aspect of his life and teaching, including his resistance to Nazi totalitarianism.
However, his questions on this issue, in personal letters while incarcerated in the last year of his life, must be read carefully and within the contexts of his own reservations. And they certainly were never intended to be a contributing factor for a whole movement—by now discredited—that claimed God is dead.

So, an explanation is in order.

Only one time does Bonhoeffer use the phrase “non-religious Christianity.” And even then, in a letter to Eberhard Bethge, it is in order to ask a hypothetical question regarding a definition of the same. Bethge maintains that the more common Bonhoefferian expression is “[n]onreligious interpretation,” [which] means Christological interpretation. It might not mean that for others, but it did for Bonhoeffer.” Bonhoeffer specifically references justification, and uses Paul and circumcision as an analogy: “The Pauline question of whether [circumcision] is a condition for justification is today, in my opinion, the question of whether religion is a condition for salvation.” One extremely important point of note is that Bonhoeffer never in fact defines “religion” or “develops any closed theory of religion,” though he does normally seem to equate it with the outward trappings, the externals, even the anthropocentric and, thus, perhaps self-righteous elements of worship; with the inward-focused nature of the individualistic heart; with the human yearning, striving, “activity to reach the beyond; the postulation of a deity in order to get help and protection when needed” (deus ex machina); and with “form[s] of self-actualization and self-justification” in contrast to a Christian gospel-centered, this-worldly, vocational-incarnational focus on neighbor, on others. “Jesus calls not to a new religion but to life.” Nonetheless, Bonhoeffer does not systematically identify “religion.” Indeed, “[i]t seems that Bonhoeffer is using the word ‘religion’ in a way that not only makes a definition of its content difficult, but often does not even try to provide any such definition.” This makes “the large number of misinterpretations understandable, all of which presuppose Bonhoeffer to be operating with a fixed concept of religion and then on the basis of this presupposition attempt to explain the nonreligious interpretation.”

“Whatever he meant by ‘religionless Christianity,’ he certainly did not think it eclipsed the need for prayer, worship and sacrament,” writes Stephen R. Haynes, author of The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon.

Bonhoeffer’s struggle—and he admitted he had yet to come up with a conclusive answer—was how to present (at times, shockingly) the gospel to an increasingly secularized world: evangelism, catechesis, proclamation. In such attempts, for example, in a letter of 16 July 1944, Bonhoeffer’s theology of the cross and his understanding of the deus absconditus come to the fore:

God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17 [Is. 53:4] makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering! This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all other religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as deus ex machina [sic].
The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God; only the suffering God can help.\textsuperscript{49}

Earlier he had also written that “[t]he day will come...when people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. It will be in a new language, perhaps quite non-religious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’s language, so that people will be alarmed and yet overcome by its power—the language of a new righteousness and truth, a language proclaiming that God makes peace with humankind and that God’s kingdom is drawing near...(Jer 33:9).”\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, “if one wants to speak of God ‘nonreligiously,’ then one must speak in such a way that the godlessness of the world is not covered up in any way, but rather precisely to uncover it and surprise the world by letting light shine on it.”\textsuperscript{51} Bonhoeffer himself never gave up traditional, biblical terminology, insisting that the “simple language of the Bible should best be maintained...”\textsuperscript{52}

Charles Ford, perhaps the leading Bonhoeffer scholar in the LCMS, helpfully alerts us to the fact that “leading figures in the resistance, including members of Bonhoeffer’s own family, were motivated by nineteenth century liberal thought and far from Christianity. It was specifically to address [them] that Bonhoeffer wanted to develop a ‘non-religious’ interpretation of Christianity. In approaching the liberal resistance, Bonhoeffer wanted to present Christianity gradually in ways that addressed issues which they were encountering.” Bonhoeffer was attempting to formulate an evangelistic paradigm, within the context of a catechetical model. “In this he appealed to early church tradition in which catechumens were asked to leave the liturgy before Holy Communion. His ‘non-religious’ language for Christianity was like a catechism. At some point the catechumens will be ready for traditional Christian language. One can notice how members of his family come gradually to speak traditional Christian language, especially as they faced execution.” Ford concludes by pointing out that subsequent to Bonhoeffer’s “reflections on ‘non-religious’ language, Bonhoeffer himself returned to traditional language after the failure of the attempted assassination of Hitler”\textsuperscript{53} on 20 July 1944. For example, in his last letter to Bethge, 23 August 1944, he writes, “You must never doubt that I am thankfully and cheerfully going along the path on which I am being led. My past life is filled to the brim with God’s goodness, and the forgiving love of the Crucified One covers my guilt.”\textsuperscript{54} As such, the real legacy of \textit{Letters and Papers from Prison} is of a man, suffering in prison, whose life—as Bonhoeffer writes on 21 July 1944—manifests “discipline and...the ever-present knowledge of death and resurrection.” It is the legacy of a professor who learns repentance, staying awake “with Christ in Gethsemane.” It is the legacy of a theologian who “learns to have faith...living fully in the midst of life’s tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities,” throwing himself “completely into the arms of God.” It is the legacy of a pastor who thus ultimately knows what it is to be “a human being, a Christian.”\textsuperscript{55} It is the legacy of a Christian whose faith is severely tested and which redounds to the highest glory of the Lord.\textsuperscript{56}

Finally, it must always be kept in mind that Bonhoeffer’s unsystematic ruminations on nonreligious interpretation are discussing and asking questions in personal
letters from jail to his best friend. These writings “were intended for those who were already thoroughly familiar with his work.” As such, points out Heinz Tödt, chair of the original board for the German edition of Bonhoeffer Werke, Bonhoeffer’s discussion is “unguarded…, experimental…, bold, trusting that the reader, the intimate friend, will understand, complete and add more to thoughts that had remained unfinished…” Accordingly, Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge:

What might surprise or perhaps even worry you would be my theological thoughts and where they are leading, and here is where I really miss you very much. I don’t know anyone else with whom I can talk about them and arrive at some clarity… It’s all still at a very early stage, and as usual I’m guided more by my instinct for responding to questions that may arise than being already clear about them… You are the only one with whom I venture to think aloud like this, hoping it will clarify my thoughts… [These] theological thoughts do preoccupy me incessantly, but then there are hours, too, when one is content with the ongoing processes of life and faith without reflecting on them.

Conclusion

To whom then does Dietrich Bonhoeffer belong? To the “evangelicals”? The “liberals”? Metaxas? Green and Barnett? The Lutherans? The Christians? The world? Who owns Bonhoeffer?! Well, read him. For in reading Bonhoeffer—in the context of his own works and of history, charitably—in reading his works, the reader owns Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He belongs to you.

But, to clarify, in faithfully treading the Bonhoeffer maze, the reader is ultimately not led to some sort of egocentric, self-satisfying, self-imaged, “religious” misuse of Bonhoeffer. Rather, the maze leads to Christ crucified, and to life. Indeed, Bonhoeffer was the first to ask questions about himself, and to whom he belongs: “Who am I?…Whoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!”

Lutheran, indeed all Christian, pastors and theologians today must engage this theological giant. The most complete and historical way of doing so is through DBWE. For it is in these pages that we can see that, in 2011 as much as in the 1930s and 1940s, Bonhoeffer works.

Endnotes

e.g., Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Time* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 202–206), ca. 1932–1943, and 1943–1945 (imprisonment). One could even divide the second phase into two sub-periods of ca. 1932–ca. 1936 and ca. 1936–ca. 1943, as Bonhoeffer himself indicates such a development. See his comments regarding *The Cost of Discipleship* (begun 1933, published 1937) in *DBWE* 8:485–486; see also Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt, “Editors’ Afterword to the German Edition,” in Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, eds., Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, trans., *Discipleship*, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 307–309. The third phase could also be divided into two sub-periods of April 1943–April 1944 and April 1944–9 April 1945 as “the end of Bonhoeffer’s hopes for a trial was an unmistakable dividing line” (Christian Gremmels, “Editor’s Afterword to the German Edition,” *DBWE* 8:585), which Bonhoeffer himself indicates in a letter of 11 April 1944; *DBWE* 8:353. Importantly, it is in a letter of 30 April 1944 (*DBWE* 8:361–367) that Bonhoeffer for the first time begins addressing and asking about “non-religious interpretation.”


9 See endnote 25.

10 The material in this paragraph is found in Victoria J. Barnett, “General Editor’s Foreword,” *DBWE* 8:xvi–xvii.

11 For more information, see http://dietrichbonhoeffer.org/Events.html.

12 Geoffrey B. Kelly, ed., Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtless, trans., *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). With *Discipleship* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*, these titles have been given different names in the DBWE than in those English translations that appeared previously.


16 See endnote 1.


21 E.g., the one on the *Primum Usus Legis* was “written for a committee appointed by the Tenth Old Prussian Confessing Synod in November 1941 for the purpose of preparing a presentation on “The Meaning of the Signs of the Times.”” See *DBWE* 16:502, 540, 584; cf. *DBWE* 6:477.
Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., “General Editor’s Foreword,” DBWE 5:viiii.

Barbara Wojhorski is a “professional editor who [prepares] the manuscripts of the final volumes for publication” (Victoria J. Barnett, “General Editor’s Foreword,” DBWE 8:xiit).

Victoria J. Barnett, “General Editor’s Foreword,” DBWE 8:xiit. Barnett’s “perspective is that these are historical documents and need to be translated as they were written” (Barnett, e-mail to this writer, 5 May 2011). Also, as the translations are new, this means at times the loss of some of Bonhoeffer’s famous aphorisms. For example, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die” is now “Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death,” though the former is preserved in a footnote. A literal translation would read “Every call of Christ leads into death.” (DBWE 8:48t).


DBWE 6:20t–207.


DBWE 6:20t–207. See also Jordan J. Ballor’s observations at Touchstone magazine’s “Mere Comments:”


Clifford Green (vols. 1, 6, 7, 10), Larry Rasmussen (vol. 12), Marshall Johnson (vol. 9), H. Gaylon Barker (vol. 14 [forthcoming]), and Mark Brocker (vol. 16) are in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Barnett (vols. 11, 14, and 15 [all forthcoming]; vol. 16; General Editor), who was a member of the Evangelical Church of Germany for 25 years, and Floyd (vol. 2; former General Editor) are Episcopalians. Geoffrey Kelly (vol. 4, 5) is Roman Catholic, John de Gruchy (vol. 3, 8) is a member of the United Congregational Church of South Africa, and John Godsey (vol. 4) was Methodist. Keith Clements (vol. 13) is Baptist. Paul Matheny (vol. 9) and Michael Lukens (vol. 11 [forthcoming]) are Presbyterian. For a volume from a conservative, confessional Lutheran perspective on Bonhoeffer’s life, theology, and the church struggle, see Torbjörn Johansson, ed., Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Perspektiv på hans liv, teologi och kyrkokamp (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2007).

See endnote 3.


This is the correct translation of the phrase found in a 30 April 1944 letter to Bethge: cf. DBWE 8:363.

H. Elliot Wright, “Aftermath of Flossenburg; Bonhoeffer, 1945–1970: An Interview with Eberhard


37 30 April 1944, DBWE 8:365–366. See also the letter of 8 June 1944, DBWE 8:430.


39 See letter of 5 May 1944; DBWE 8:373, where Bonhoeffer’s incarnational emphasis is also found.

40 30 April 1944; DBWE 8:362.

41 Edward D. Schneider, “Bonhoeffer and a Secular Theology,” 152. Such anti-incarnational sentiments were precisely what Bonhoeffer was working against: his model was intentionally incarnationally-focused (John 1:14; DBWE 8:373 [5 May 1944]).


43 Of copious examples see DBWE 8:485–486 (21 July 1944); DBWE 8:501 (3 August 1944); and DBWE 6:400 (Ethics).

44 18 July 1944; DBWE 8:482.

45 See also Christian Gremmels, “Editor’s Afterword to the German Edition,” DBWE 8:586.


48 “Bonhoeffer’s theme is not the ‘coming of age,’ ‘this-worldliness,’ and ‘religionlessness’ of the modern world. As plausible and impressive as these expressions are, theologically they function only as auxiliary concepts. They serve the task of witnessing to the presence of Jesus Christ in the present… ’ ‘What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today?’” (Christian Gremmels, “Editor’s Afterword to the German Edition,” DBWE 8:588; cf. 30 April 1944, DBWE 8:362).

49 16 July 1944; DBWE 8:479–480. Cf. DBWE 8:590, ed. note 89.

50 May 1944; DBWE 8:390. See also 8 June 1944; DBWE 8:431.


52 For example, “cross,” “sin,” “grace,” etc.; DBWE 16:40–41: This letter from 23 March 1940 contains important thoughts of Bonhoeffer on “the whole problem of church language.” See also Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 881.

53 Ford, e-mail to this writer, 18 June 2006. Also published as “Luther and Bonhoeffer misunderstood,” *Christian News*, 3 July 2006, 23. Some have called these leading figures in the resistance, whom Bonhoeffer was trying to reach, “homesick humanists.” Ford also asserts that these “writings are, among other things, directed against the social gospel movement and its neglect of ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ, the savior of the sinner’ [Bonhoeffer]” (Charles Ford, “The Stereotyping of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Lutheran Forum* 35, no. 3 [2001]: 34).

54 23 August 1944; DBWE 8:517. See also 21 July 1944; DBWE 8:486.

55 21 July 1944; DBWE 8:486.

56 See, e.g., the poems “Whom Am I?” from July 1944, DBWE 8:459–460; and “Stations on the Way to Freedom” from 14 August 1944, DBWE 8:512–514. “For me the way that my entire situation has gone is quite decisively a question of faith… ” (22 December 1943; DBWE 8:235).


59 From letters of 30 April, 8 June, 8 July, 18 July, 21 July 1944. DBWE 8:362, 425, 457, 482, 485. July 1944; DBWE 8:460.

60 For what, in this writer’s estimation, are Bonhoeffer’s most helpful themes, see Eric R. Andrae, “Pro Deo et Patria: Themes of the Cruciform Life in Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 71–95; also available at http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/andraeprodeoptpatriciahemesthemesofthecruciformlifedietchristbioneerhoeffner.pdf.

Finally, thank you to Victoria Barnett, Gaylon Barker, and Richard Weikart for some assistance with this review.
THE COMPANY THEY KEEP: 

Collaboration in community is beneficial to the writer who uses it. You and some friends of yours would benefit from meeting together, sharing ideas, reading works in progress, giving and receiving critique, encouraging one another, and a host of other related activities. That’s the major lesson I learned from reading Diana Glyer’s excellent book, now the definitive treatment of the Inklings. Come to think of it, as I reflect on my career, similar experiences have had a profound influence on my writing.

One need not assume that it is cheating or unethical to benefit from the influence of others. Glyer laments the fact that influence implies “accusations of unimaginativeness, lack of originality, plagiarism, theft, and so forth” (citing Hermerén, 216). While not blaming American individualism for this modern love of independence, Dr. Glyer could have done so. She could have also drawn on the New Testament concept of the body of Christ to defend writing in community. But she was convincing without those points. Her positions are carefully drawn and fully documented; all of them based on her study of the writings of those whom we call Inklings.

One of the major positions contradicted in this book is that of Humphrey Carpenter, who stated of the Inklings, “It must be remembered that the word ‘influence,’ so beloved of literary investigators, makes little sense when talking about their association with each other” (The Inklings, 160, cited in Glyer, xvi). Other scholars have echoed Carpenter, but you will be hard pressed to agree with Carpenter & Company after reading Glyer. That the Inklings themselves were very different from one another cannot be doubted, but that these differences translated into ‘no influence’ is an unacceptable, though logical, conclusion. These very differences were part of the glue that held them together, as were the Christian faith and their interest in literary topics.

After an initial chapter describing the historical foundations of the Inklings (characters, how they met, meeting days, times, and locations), the book is organized around the insights of Karen Burke LeFevre’s four roles of influence: writers in writing groups as (1) resonators (encouragers, supporters), (2) opponents (healthy criticism), (3) editors (comments, suggestions), and (4) collaborators (co-authorship) (Glyer, 40, citing LeFevre’s Invention as a Social Act). I will illustrate each of these four roles with one powerful Glyer-provided example.

**Resonators:** In 1944, Tolkien, the notorious non-finisher, was “dead stuck” on The Lord of the Rings. Then, he had lunch with Lewis on March 29, 1944, and of this lunch he wrote, “He is putting the screw on me to finish mine.” On April 3, Tolkien wrote, “I have begun to nibble at [The Lord of the Rings] again.”

**Opponents:** The so-called “Great War” correspondence of Owen Barfield and C. S. Lewis, now published in Walter Hooper’s Collected Letters, Vol. III, pages 1596–1646,
affected both authors. Both Barfield and Lewis insisted that the other regularly prevailed, and these debates were important in Lewis’ later conversion to Christianity. Lewis credits Barfield for demolishing his chronological snobbery, i.e. the belief that “later is better,” which gave Lewis a new appreciation for ancient documents like the Bible.

Editors: Here, Glyer clearly refutes the claim that Tolkien was not influenced by the comments he received. For example, she provides data from Lewis’s feedback on a poem of Tolkien, *The Lay of Leithian*, providing instances of Tolkien’s original wording, Lewis’s suggested wording, and Tolkien’s final wording, thereby forever laying to rest the mistaken belief that Tolkien did not respond to the comments of others.

Collaborators: One of the well-known collections of essays is the work intended to honor Charles Williams, which, because of his untimely death, became a memorial to him and a source of some small income for his widow, the work *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. If you want other examples in each category, buy the book!

A subsequent chapter describes the dozens of times where Inklings became characters in one of their writings, where characteristics of Inklings became features of book characters (Priscilla Tolkien was convinced that the Ransom of Lewis’s trilogy was based on her father), where poems referred to events in the lives of other Inklings, where books were dedicated to other Inklings, where reviews were written about one another’s books, where the writings of another Inkling was credited as an influence in one’s own work (Barfield’s *Poetic Diction* being very influential in Lewis’s thinking), or where memorial articles, memoirs, or obituaries were written by Inklings about one another. The book also contains an excellent twenty-page index. C. S. Lewis, Warren Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, and Charles Williams were the five major Inklings. But, according to David Bratman’s Appendix and Glyer herself (11), there are nineteen “canonical” Inklings. Who are the others? Buy the book!

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When Jesus was walking along the road to Emmaus he brought comfort and clarity to his friends by beginning with Moses and the Prophets (Lk 24:13–32). The Old Testament (hereafter OT) still has power to bring about a burning awareness of God’s promises in Jesus Christ, but many pastors are intimidated by Israel’s long and winding road with its promising starts, unexpected twists and turns, ecstatic highs and depressing lows. This book offers guidance for those who want to take up preaching anew from the OT and present it in such a way that people’s hearts burn with greater devotion
and faithfulness for Jesus (see Lk 24:32). Contributors include well-known evangelicals Daniel Block, Tremper Longman, Gordon Wenham, Hugh Williamson, and Christopher Wright. Each chapter includes a discussion of a particular genre (i.e., narrative, lament, poetry, prophetic, wisdom, apocalyptic) and then concludes with a sample sermon. The last two chapters are titled “Preaching from Difficult Texts” and “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament.” The ongoing advice is this: We should not ask, “What does this mean for me now?” until we have worked hard to find out, “What did it mean for them then?”

Laurence Turner points out in his essay, “Preaching Narrative: Plot” that all too often pastors take an OT narrative and turn it into “three timeless truths.” These types of sermons flatten narrative sequences and end up with titles like “What Would Abraham Do?” or “Nehemiah the CEO.” Rather than “de-plotting” the text and ending up with legalistic guilt or sentimental idealism, a better method is to allow the sermon to unfold as the narrative is retold. Along the way, the pastor then makes connections with the world of the congregation. This type of sermon produces two stories and invites people to participate in the text while also letting it do to people what it was intended to do to those who first heard/read it. The order of the narrative controls the sermon structure.

Federico Villanueva offers a very compelling essay titled “Preaching Lament.” Laments resist the temptation to tie everything up in a pretty bow and announce, “They all lived happily ever after.” Such texts leave us lingering in the darkness waiting for light. For example, Psalm 88 offers no redemption and ends, literally in the Hebrew, with the word “darkness.” Sometimes life is like that. Faith does not always immediately resolve our pain and problems. It is OK not to be OK.

Hugh Williamson’s first bit of advice on preaching from Isaiah is to realize that, although it is a long book with many sections that are distinct from each other, they are linked with a plethora of other texts. “There are very few extended passages in the book of Isaiah which [sic] do not have parallels, citations or allusions elsewhere in the book” (147). Isaiah 1 lays out the book’s overall message which in simple terms also reflects the prophet’s three main sections: judgment (Is 1:1–9 = Isaiah 1–39), salvation (Is 1:10–20 = Isaiah 40–55), and the call to respond (Is 1:21–31 = Isaiah 56–66). Justice and righteousness are hallmark features of Isaiah. The prophet sees none of it (e.g., 1:21–23; 5:7), but is certain that the Davidic Messiah will become the locus of a reformation that marks Israel with concern for the orphan, widow, and alien in the gate (e.g., Is 9:7; 11:1–4; 32:1). Few question that Isaiah’s call in chapter 6 becomes one of the paramount features in the book’s theology. Due in large part to his vision in the temple, Isaiah understands that hierarchy is one of God’s most important organizing ideas. The prophet indicates that anyone who claims to be “high and lifted up,” other than Yahweh, is doomed to crash and burn. For instance, trees, mountains, hills, and the ships of Tarshish (Is 2:12–17), all symbolizing human hubris, must realize “Yahweh alone will be lifted up on that day” (Is 2:11, 17).

One of the OT’s great renewal
events took place when Ezra and the Levites “read from the book of God’s Torah, making the meanings clear and helping people understand what they read” (Neh 8:8). Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching enables and inspires its readers to preach in the same way to the end that the OT becomes more intelligible, credible, and transformational.

Reed Lessing


The claim is often made that representative democracy requires a Christian culture to remain viable because it arose on the soil of Christendom. The claim, however, is hotly contested. To address that debate the Catholic Academy of Bavaria invited two high-profile German intellectuals to give addresses on January 19, 2004. Jürgen Habermas, one of the most influential German philosophers of the past century, represented the secular claim that democratic regimes can—indeed, should—function without any religious commitments. Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, argued that democratic regimes require a pre-political moral foundation.

The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion reproduces each man’s address. Habermas leads off with a somewhat technical paper, the central claim of which is, “Political liberalism…understands itself as a nonreligious and postmetaphysical justification of the normative bases of the democratic constitutional state” (24). In other words, basic democratic principles are not justified by religious teachings or other assumptions about human beings. Instead, a democratic government draws its authority from the fact that it permits all people to be involved in a process of dialogue by which opinion is formed and common decisions are reached. That is not to say that citizens submit to democratic constitutions for these reasons alone; Habermas argues (contrary to some who defend political liberalism) that “political virtues, even if they are only ‘levied’ in small coins, so to speak, are essential if a democracy is to exist” (30). If a democracy is to hold together, the various beliefs systems (what Habermas calls ethical orientations) of citizens must be reshaped to promote an orientation toward the common good and a commitment to preserving democratic practices.

At this point in his argument, Habermas makes a rather surprising claim: “I do not wish to speak of the phenomenon of the continued existence of religion in a largely secularized environment simply as a societal fact: philosophy must take this phenomenon seriously from within, so to speak, as a cognitive challenge” (38). Unlike many other proponents of secular political theories, Habermas is not promoting a naked public square. In fact, he contends, “If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other’s contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate” (47). In other words, one important political virtue is a form of humility in which non-
religious people are willing to learn from religious people and vice versa. For this reason, Habermas explicitly argues that “naturalistic world views . . . do not in the least enjoy a prima facie advantage over competing world views or religious understandings” (51).

Ratzinger, like Habermas, is interested in “applying the criterion of law to power” (58–59)—that is, ensuring that law is “the vehicle of justice rather than the privilege of those who have the power to make the law” (59). Conscious that majoritarian democracy can lead to the oppression of minorities under unjust laws, Ratzinger poses the question “of whether there is something that can never become law but always remains injustice; or, to reverse this formulation, whether there is something that is of its very nature inalienably law, something that is antecedent to every majority decision and must be respected by all such decisions” (60). Ratzinger acknowledges that natural law has played an important role in the church’s reflection on this question, but he claims that “this instrument has become blunt” because it presupposes a concept of nature which is no longer tenable in our culture. What is necessary, therefore, is dialogue regarding “whether there might exist a rationality of nature and, hence, a rational law for man and for his existence in the world” (72). This dialogue must be intercultural because the problem of law and power is now international in scope.

The great challenge, according to Ratzinger, is “that there no longer exists any uniformity within the individual cultural spheres, since they are all marked by profound tensions within their cultural tradition”—and here he is speaking as much about the Eastern and Islamic spheres as about the Western sphere (73). Both the Western tradition of reason and the various religious traditions have shown themselves vulnerable to a variety of dangerous pathologies. Neither reason nor religion may claim a privileged position. “Accordingly, I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another” (78). Ratzinger believes that only on the basis of an intercultural dialogue with mutual purification of faith and reason can a shared understanding of what man is and what justice is “once again become an effective force in mankind” (80). Democracy can function only with such a shared understanding.

Practically speaking, Habermas and Ratzinger do not come out far from one another. Both men would, by and large, agree on what makes for a just democracy. The question is whether democratic principles draw their normative authority from themselves or from a source of moral truth that is logically prior to them. Habermas claims the former; Ratzinger the latter. As a result, each man poses the problem differently. For Habermas the problem is preserving democracy from the corrosive effects of parochial ethical orientations while for Ratzinger the problem is achieving a universal ethical orientation because that is what makes democracy possible.

Unfortunately, we do not have the further conversations between the two men. As I see it, each man has more to answer. Ratzinger, for his part, turns to dialogue as a means for establishing a universal ethical orientation that can safeguard justice, but I wonder whether the
turn to dialogue does not actually concede the game to Habermas. Ratzinger’s vision of dialogue, in which both the Christian tradition and the Western rational tradition give up their claims to hegemony, already presupposes specific notions of justice—precisely the ones Habermas has elucidated in his earlier works. Habermas, on the other hand, continues to harbor the Enlightenment’s suspicion of particular ethical orientations as a danger to democratic politics, even as he opens the public square up to religious arguments in a most surprising and refreshing way. In opening up the public sphere as he has, however, he may have granted that democratic principles do not have the gravitas to garner widespread cooperation without these ethical orientations, which is Ratzinger’s point.

For those interested in the intersection among faith, reason, and politics, the Habermas-Ratzinger debate is a must read. Habermas invalidates the stereotype that all versions of political liberalism reject religious arguments in the public sphere, and he provides a succinct summary of one stream of secular political philosophy. Ratzinger prods us to acknowledge politically what we already acknowledge missionally: the Christian faith exists alongside a wide range of other faiths and ideologies so we may not simply claim cultural hegemony. Moreover, at a time when the LCMS is beginning to turn to natural law, Ratzinger challenges its legitimacy as a tool for dialogue.

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THE CLASSICAL TRADITION.

This is a guide “to the reception of classical Graeco-Roman antiquity in all its dimensions in later cultures.” What “reception…in later cultures” means can be quickly understood from the images in this massive volume. For example, there’s a photograph of a Mobil gas station with the company logo, Pegasus, the “winged steed, unwearying of flight, sweeping through air swift as a gale of wind” (Pindar). Two visuals on the back jacket cover are about the priest Laocoon, who warned his fellow citizens not to take the Trojan Horse into the city. The first shows the second century A. D. sculpture of Laocoon and his two sons struggling to free themselves from the deadly wrap of two serpents sent by Poseidon to punish them. The second image is a cartoon, “Laocoon’s Sausage” that shows a butcher and two assistants struggling to free themselves from a long string of sausages. With interesting photographs and paintings but predominantly through numerous articles, scholars present various classical topics and trace how they were received in post-classical cultures.

Take the article “Rhetoric,” for example, to which I went because of the profound effect that classical rhetoric has had upon Christian preaching, though few know that any longer. The author of this article, Kathy Eden of Columbia University, traces the dominance of Cicero through 15 centuries. “Until the 15th century no other classical authority exerted anything like the influence of
Cicero on rhetorical training in its various forms” (829a). That included a dominant influence upon Christian homiletics.

“Ciceronian rhetoric also met the needs of the pulpit” (828a). At the center of that Ciceronian influence was Augustine and his “On Christian Doctrine.”

“Augustine skillfully filled the new bottles of an emerging Christianity with the old wine of the rhetorical tradition, thereby joining the ranks of other influential Christian intellectuals, including Basil, Tertullian, Lactantius, Ambrose, and Jerome, who gave their rhetorical talents, both practical and theoretical, to the early Church” (828b). Listen to colloquial talk today and the word “rhetoric” means deception, spinning the truth. Plato had thought that, but he did not convince the popular mind of his day or of later antiquity. It was only in the nineteenth century that this misunderstanding of rhetoric gained dominance. “During the last hundred years and more the classical rhetorical tradition has remained almost exclusively an advanced academic specialty with little or no direct effect on general education or political life. I use the word ‘direct,’ however, because the rhetorical principles forged as part of the classical tradition belong ineradicably to—because woven imperceptibly into—the fabric of contemporary intellectual life” (830b).

You might think that the contents of this volume, typified by the article on “rhetoric,” are filled with arcane information that is not very helpful for the demands of ministry. Not true. Meeting with our students and faculty, President Matthew Harrison called for a revival of preaching. If we turn back to the ancients, turn back to their yet unmatched teachings on communica-

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Bible, Luther, Melanchthon, sin-grace, Law-Gospel and the like, but, in an author like Melanchthon, we have the topics that give us conversation bridges through which we share “the hope that is in us.” Lest you dismiss Melanchthon for his later wavering, Kusukawa reminds us of his importance. “If Melanchthon’s posthumous reputation as a Lutheran remains ambiguous, his legacy as the Praeceptor Germaniae (Teacher of Germany) is indisputable” (581a).

There are about 450 articles in *The Classical Tradition*. Some, like “Rhetoric” and “Melanchthon,” offer information that is hands-on useable to us in our church work. Other articles give background, setting us on the path of further study, if we will. Each article concludes with a short bibliography. An example of background information for our work is the article by Richard Jenkyns of the University of Oxford on “Homosexuality.” His quick survey of homosexual references in classic authors leads him to several conclusions. “The fact that the best Greek love poetry is homosexual and the best in Latin is heterosexual does seem to reflect differences between Greek and Roman society” (453b). “The Romans did not commonly regard love for youths as perverse or shocking” (453a). “The greatest importance of Greece to homosexual apologists has been as a culture in which homosexuality was openly discussed, and where it was even admired and idealized” (453b). Jenkyns shows how Plato’s Symposium has often been cited by apologists for homosexuality through the years. If our church is going to engage the changing morals of the twenty-first century American, this kind of background information is necessary so that we accurately study and speak the biblical word.

Hoping that those three articles give you a feeling for the book, let me be realistic. Because *The Classical Tradition* costs $49.95, you probably won’t add it to your personal library unless you’re a lover of the Greek and Roman classics. But this volume should be in a library near you, your community library and perhaps your church library, assuming your church library has books of substance in addition to the popular books that dominate the Christian market. You can use it as a rich resource for “discovery,” for “hitting on what to say” for a sermon or Bible class. *The Classical Tradition* will take its place with *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* as a resource work often pulled down from the shelf. It certainly will come down often from mine.

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On the cover: Detail of word cloud of the Augsburg Confession (Triglotta translation) created by Travis Scholl at http://www.wordle.net/show/wrdl/4227180/Augsburg_Confession.

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Oral Performance of Biblical Texts in the Early Church

Publishing Authority:
The Text of the Book of Concord

A Bibliography of the 1580 Dresden Concordia