

Seminary Ridge Review is published twice per year by the United Lutheran Seminary, a July 1, 2017 consolidation of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg and The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

ISSN 1526-0674

© 2017 by United Lutheran Seminary.

Subscriptions are free to libraries of seminaries and divinity schools and to United Lutheran Seminary students, faculty and alumni.

Contact:

Seminary Ridge Press
United Lutheran Seminary
61 Seminary Ridge
Gettysburg, PA 17325

seminaryridgereview.org
www.UnitedLutheranSeminary.edu

Editor: The Rev. Dr. Brooks Schramm bschramm@uls.edu

Guest Editor for this issue: The Rev. Dr. Maria Erling merling@uls.edu

Managing Editor: The Rev. John Spangler jspangler@uls.edu

Design & Production: Katy Giebenhain kgiebenhain@uls.edu

Printed by Sheridan PA in Hanover, Pennsylvania. Typeset by Phil Wolfe in Hanover, Pennsylvania.

On the cover: The Omupembe Cultural Group display a dramatic piece of Namibian culture. From the Lutheran World Federation Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, taken on May 14, 2017. The photograph by Albin Hillert is reprinted with permission. Visit www.albinhillert.se.


SEMINARY
RIDGE PRESS

United
Lutheran
Seminary
GETTYSBURG-
PHILADELPHIA

SEMINARY RIDGE REVIEW

AUTUMN, 2017 | VOLUME 20, NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

- 1 Editor's Note: For You, for Your Ministry
- 3 Neither Fellowship or Patience, nor Toleration or Acceptance:
Believing, Belonging, Luther, the Jews, and Questions on
Contemporary Nationalism
J. Jayakiran Sebastian
- 15 How We Were Joined
Maria Erling
- 25 From Namibia: The Global March of the Reformation
John Spangler
- 32 Building Global Relationships: Reflections on the LWF
12th Assembly
Joel Neubauer
- 38 A Hermeneutic of Hope: A Christian Response to Climate Change
Scott Grier
- 45 The Reformation Will be Local
Samuel F. Chamelin
- 52 Sermon on Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28
Alan Bray
- 55 Flag and Cross: A Challenge to the Church
The 2017 Urban Theological Institute Lecture
J. Wendell Mapson, Jr.
- 64 Writing the Land
Amy Wright

Poetry + Theology Rubric

Katy Giebenhain

97 Fine Arts Rubric

Gerald Christianson

105 Book Reviews on

Berndt Hamm's *Abläss und Reformation – Erstaunliche Kohärenzen*

(reviewed by Baird Tipson) and Michael P. DeJonge's

Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther (reviewed by Brian A. Evans)

For You, for Your Ministry

Maria Erling

This issue of *Seminary Ridge Review* has been compiled by a pastor, a professor, and a poet, as a treasury of reflection from the many hands, hearts, and minds that make up our multiverse of pastors and deacons, alums and readers throughout a very much expanded constituency of the two seminaries. Whether you serve in suburban D.C., Western Maryland, Northern New England, or New York State, or California, or Geneva, Switzerland, we all share a responsibility for expanding the capacity and horizon for faithful service.

These reflections, articles, reviews, and poems are designed to prompt more critical thinking on the Re-formation that churches need in the everchanging churchscape and cityscape around us.

In this important 500 anniversary year for the Reformation, this issue provides our own regional reflection on many of the same themes that guided the recent meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Windhoek, Namibia: *Liberated by God's Grace: Salvation, not for sale; Humans, not for sale, Creation, not for sale*. These Reformation guideposts also call us to critically review our lives as Christians in this world, so that the Gospel can all-the-more be experienced and shared. Our issue starts off with truth-telling about how the reality of Jewish-Christian relationships and false nationalism have scarred Christianity. The report from the assembly in Namibia reminds us that American churches have partners who can help us see these issues close at home. Two of the students who attended the assembly as visitors record how worship stimulated them, and how the climate debate became real as the church's concern. The featured presentation at this fall's Urban Theological Institute lecture reminds us that our political climate is so hot that human values are at stake; calls to action and reflection filled the sermon we share from a Minnesota congregation.

In order to introduce our expanded readership to the launching of United Lutheran Seminary, this issue provides a history of the relationship between Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries, going back to the founding of the original, Lutheran Theological

Seminary in 1826. It points to the ways that fervent leaders had tried on many occasions to bring together the two strains of Pennsylvania Lutherans. The story may be familiar to some, and this account is far from complete. We live together and learn more. Please let us know what you think.

For your Reformation research impulses, two book reviews give us a Reformation lesson, and a prod to deeper ethical reflection. The review of the history of the indulgence controversy promises to upend the traditional view of that reform. And, finally, a book review commends for you the recent Bonhoeffer biography for showing a path towards an awakened ethical conscience for our time.

Throughout the issue hopeful signs appear. See what prompts deeper reflection for you. Read the glimpses in the poems, which startle and point in new directions.

These new directions are for you.

They come from us, a pastor, a professor, a poet, and from students, friends, alums.

They are not for sale. They are free.

Neither Fellowship or Patience, nor Toleration or Acceptance: Believing, Belonging, Luther, the Jews, and Questions on Contemporary Nationalism

J. Jayakiran Sebastian

... Like a body stung by leeches:
You closed your eyes.
They trashed us with lashes barbed with injustice,
Till our bare backs were skinned and bloodied.
Yet you didn't even sigh in sympathy.
They shackled us;
They robbed us of our freedom.
They trapped us in a vicious mesh of religion and caste
To turn us into their slaves: they made us slaves
And threw us into dark dungeons.
Concepts of justice and injustice are only man-made.
But you, O Devil,
Who are the living dead on constant fire,
Couldn't you make the difference between the right and the wrong?
You gave a nod in favor of tyranny. [...]¹

Introduction – Two Interconnected Personal Notes

One of the “fattest” (that’s how I, as a very young boy, thought of very thick volumes) books in my father’s collection of material connected with the Nazi era was the paperback edition of William L. Shirer’s monumental 1960 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*:

A History of Nazi Germany.² I had already heard of Martin Luther from my grandmother, especially about his valor when confronted by the power of the state at the Diet of Worms, and it was with shock that I read a section describing anti-Semitism that I thought came from the Nazis, only to discover that it was describing aspects of Luther's thinking, and a connection that I have never been able to shake off was made.³

My second personal note is about Wilhelm Kling, a German Lutheran missionary from the Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg, a mechanic who came out to India in 1928 and served at the Mission Station of Puttur, a small town, then 10 hours from Mangalore by bullock-cart and ferry. Mangalore was where the pioneer missionaries from the Basel Mission, mainly coming from South Germany and North Switzerland, began their mission work in 1834. Early one morning in the 1930's, Rev. Kling must have been surprised to find a panic-stricken woman carrying a small baby begging for refuge after having fled her village, where her husband had been killed in a land-dispute by members of the family, who in fear of her life and that of her small child, ran through the forest with no possessions to the one place where she knew help could be had. In due course she was baptized "Ruth" and the baby "David," my father. His first memory is that of the funeral of the little child of the Klings, and how all the children in the orphanage followed the casket to the cemetery. (In 1986, on a visit to Puttur, Mrinalini's hometown, I rediscovered the damaged and almost unrecognizable grave of baby Kling, and in one sense I had come home, and the rediscovery of my father's childhood memory connected me with another place and another time in more ways than one.)

This isn't about nostalgia but about another influence on my life, and that was a strong childhood memory of my father being in awe of the "dorai" (the white missionary) and even more in awe of the bust that stood on his table, a bust of Hitler. Was it that missionary Kling had heard only positive things coming out of Germany in the mid-1930's? Was there something more sinister at work here? There are stories and there are rumors, but be that as it may, and recognizing the reality that childhood memories are constructed in all kinds of ways, my father never shook off his interest in the Third Reich, an interest that built up when he was a student in Heidelberg in the mid-1950's and brought back some of the earliest books documenting the Final Solution, books with photographs that I avidly consumed. I have continued the exploration of the link between attitudes triggered off in medieval and reformation Europe and the "othering" of the Jews⁴, and in this paper I will continue this briefly and attempt a link with certain tendencies that are increasingly all too apparent in India today. Linkages cannot be made in a simplistic form with a "this [...] and therefore [...]" approach, and we also need to ask as to whether Luther's thinking and writing actually made any difference to the Jewish communities in his immediate context at that time.

Analysis of the relationship, writings, attitude, and consequences of Luther's thinking about the Jews has been an ongoing field of inquiry and research, in the second half

and now first sixth of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁵ While I do not propose to give an overview and report of this convoluted, complex, and tortuous relationship, it is important to note that "in his attempts to change Jewish minds Luther came up against a brick wall, as it were. But instead of taking a deep vocational breath and pause for a dispassionate discernment (as he had done in the face of the Romanist walls), Luther intensified his slanderous argumentation with a scatological rhetoric mirroring the worst of medieval anti-Semitism."⁶ An earlier article examining aspects of this concludes: "In this ecumenical epoch Luther's poisonous legacy will forever stand between the Christian-Jewish dialogue."⁷

The Last Admonition

The genre of "the last lecture" was made immensely popular by the incredible reach and popularity of Randy Pausch's summation of his life, his illness, his work, his hopes, and his legacy in his last lecture and the subsequent book that was published.⁸ It is not fair to put Luther's last sermons in this category, since the occasion on which he delivered them was not meant to be a summation of his thinking and the opportunity to tie threads together. What came to be called one of the last sermons, since Luther died three days after this was read in Eisleben on the 15 February 1546, at a time "when he was too weak to finish preaching, but managed to read the text," was an admonition or exhortation against the Jews. Gritsch, in his study of Luther's anti-Semitism says that "Luther's final public words were anti-Semitic – against his better judgment," a theme that he analyzes throughout the book.⁹ These words, *An Admonition against the Jews*, were probably added to his second last sermon preached on February 7 and thus, probably the last words that he intended for public consumption. He did preach on February 14 and died on 18 February 1546, as someone who in the words of Schramm and Stjerna was and remained "a bitter – and proud – enemy of the Jews."¹⁰

What does Luther say in the *Admonition*?¹¹ He begins by saying that having been with these people for some time functioning as their preacher, and recognizing that he would perhaps "never preach to you again," he would like to depart with "this blessing and prayer." He goes on to link the Jews as being more than many others among the deceptive "wise and prudent ones" referenced in Matt 11:25, who have contempt for the good news and are keen, eager, and ready to do more harm. He wonders why those who "daily blaspheme and slander our Lord Jesus Christ" and "do great harm" should still be there in the midst of these people, right before their eyes, so to speak. He points out that if their invitation to receive "their kinsman, born of their flesh and blood and the true seed of Abraham" is spurned and they refuse to be baptized, they should not be tolerated. The only possibility is that if "they convert, give up usury, and receive Christ, then we will gladly regard them as our brothers." While recognizing that words that we use today like "mission" and "conversion" have multifaceted terminological histories, we need to ask what conversion

meant to Luther. Did it mean not only giving up one's religion, but also one's profession, one's way of life, one's identity, one's scriptures? The stress on usury is important, given the prejudicial undertones and easy ways in which the Jewish people could be essentialized as those who embodied the worst excesses of usury.¹²

Luther goes on to say that the Jews "have gone too far" and lists what he sees as their worst traits and actions against Christians, where they being enemies blaspheme Jesus and call his mother a whore and his followers "changelings and abortions," and, in addition, harbor the desire to "kill us" through the use of strange, but effective, slow-acting poisons. All this leads him to state that one should "not be troubled for them" since if they do not act upon the invitation to convert, then one should be clear that this means that they are "incorrigible" and will not cease blaspheming Christ, "suck you dry," and do all that it takes to kill you.

The final section of the *Admonition* is worth quoting in full:

Therefore, I beseech you not to participate in the sins of others. You have enough to pray from God, that he might be merciful to you and preserve your government even as I still pray daily and hide myself under the shield of the Son of God [Ps. 91:1]. Him I regard and honor as my Lord; to Him I must run and flee if the devil, sin, or other misfortune assails me. For He is my Shield, as broad as heaven and earth and the Hen under whose wings I crawl before God's wrath [Ps. 91:4; Matt. 23:37]. For this reason I can have neither fellowship nor patience (*keine gemeinschaft noch gedult*) with the stubborn blasphemers and slanderers of this dear Savior.

This is the final warning I wanted to give you, as your countryman: that you should not participate in the sins of others. For I would give good and faithful advice both to the lords and to their subjects. If the Jews will be converted to us and cease their blasphemy, and whatever else they have done to us, we will gladly forgive them. But if not, then neither should we tolerate or endure (*nicht dulden noch leiden*) them among us.¹³

It is worth unpacking these words again, especially in light of the fact that such attitudes have had consequences that are almost unimaginable and recognizing that scholars and theologians continue to wrestle with this legacy. Bernhard Lohse, a prominent German theologian, has an excursus on "Luther's attitude toward the Jews" at the very end of his influential book on Luther's theology, where he writes:

What is absent here in Luther is the self-critical question as to whether the picture that he was drawing of Jewish religion really applied, or whether he had retained assumptions that an unbiased examination would have to correct. Since [...] Luther

was sufficiently aware of the fateful significance of prejudice, and since he continually complained that on the Roman side none gave him fair hearing, it would not be inappropriate to expect of him greater caution toward entrenched opinions or prejudices [...] Luther did not subject his judgments to critical examination. In this regard, he was a captive to the views of his time.¹⁴

This is a rather odd conclusion since if there was anyone who was NOT a captive to "the views of his time" that would be Luther. Why is there a seeming attempt to "excuse" him for this seeming conformity to "the views of his time" when, in the rest of the book, it is obvious that there is a description of how Luther challenged, and not just challenged, in fact attempted to overturn "the views of his time"?

One possibility of looking at this is through the lens of Luther's sacramental theology. Was his attitude influenced by particular prejudicial Christian attitudes to the Jewish people and their ongoing presence in various communities and, at the same time, by how he understood baptism and conversion in relation to them? This is not the place to go into Luther's writings on baptism,¹⁵ but it is important to recognize that scattered in his writings, letters, and treatises on baptism, is a link to the Jewish people enveloped within his "principal theological insight of the saving power of faith in Christ alone."¹⁶ When this is applied to the Jewish people, then conversion was the only way forward. Stjerna summarizes this clearly: "Without a conversion, a Jew would not be saved or be of no value to him personally but rather an enemy of the gospel to be shunned – or educated. Only a properly catechized, converted, baptized Jew would be a friend of the gospel and thus a friend of Luther."¹⁷

This was articulated in the seemingly logical and persuasive words of an earlier treatise, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*,¹⁸ written in 1523. Here, in concluding his arguments, Luther talks about dealing gently with the Jews and instructing them from Scripture and goes on to say that "instead of this we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don't stink, and I know not what other foolishness. So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect to work only good among them?" He goes on to talk about how forbidding them to work and do business and engage in various forms of human interconnectedness prevents the possibility of helping them and showing them the "law of Christian love." The conclusion is pragmatically irenic: "We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either."¹⁹

Leaving aside for now the slur that prevailed among good Christian folk that the Jews stank, while they themselves smelled of deodorant(!), it is important to recognize that Luther critiques what seemed to be acceptable and common behavior at that time –

exclusion, essentialization, reductionism, casting aspersions, animalistic treatment, deep-seated disdain and contempt, hardly characteristics of a good and worthy Christian life, or perhaps this was how good and worthy Christians were expected to behave! Undoubtedly all this should be taken into consideration when we try to trace the genealogy of Luther's attitude to, and writings about, the Jews and wrestle with the legacy of the hateful and exterminationist final admonition.²⁰

And so [...] Implications and Questions

In the recent past, several Indian Christian theologians have wrestled with the legacy of Luther and, in various ways, attempted to relate this to the ongoing theological task of the church in India. A partial list would include the contributions of J. Paul Rajashekar,²¹ Henry S. Wilson,²² Santosh J. Sahayadoss,²³ and R. Sahayadhas,²⁴ among others. How can we own this as part of our own troubled and troubling legacy? We are not here to criticize for the sake of critique, and if we are indirectly complicit in this legacy, how do we move beyond self-flagellation towards an informed wrestling with this? Can we imagine an irenic future for all human persons living out the complexities of their commitments and convictions on this, our common home?

I want to conclude with a set of observations and questions. These have been inspired by my reading of the troubling discourse around the theme of *Ghar Wapsi*, including in social media, where the most outrageous claims about the "place" of minorities within a "house" have been aired and elaborated upon, only narrowly veiled behind a veneer of a debate or discussion. My reading and discussion of Luther, has reminded me of what it means when boundaries are constructed and the insider-outsider language becomes dominant and harmful. More often than not, on social media I have read violently polemical posts and reactions, and it is clear that a shrill and dangerous level of "othering" is gaining momentum even in spheres where one would expect informed and gracious engagement. In an article engaging with this, Rudolf C. Heredia writes:

To try to freeze the status quo is to trap people in the very situations from which they seek to escape in order to affirm the identity and dignity that have too long been denied them. Whether this is motivated by religious conviction and spiritual enlightenment, or by social equality and political freedom, or whatever else, their choice to convert is still well within their rights. It must not be negated by those who might be offended by this nor manipulated by those who would take advantage of them.²⁵

Again, in raising the implications of this within the fragmented reality of Indian society, Anand Teltumbde asks:

Which castes do the converts land up in? This crucial question is conveniently sidelined. Inadvertently, Yogi Adityanath, the Hindutva face of the BJP, demystified this issue by revealing that "those being subjected to ghar wapsi will be given the Gotra and caste from which they converted." That means, most converts to Islam and Christianity, being from the lower castes who had converted to escape the yoke of the caste bondage of Hinduism, would be reincarcerated into the hellhole of Hinduism which their forefathers strove to escape. What a prospect for the Muslims and Christians of India!²⁶

What has all of this have to do with the Jews of Germany at the time of Luther? How can I avoid sounding facetious in trying to draw connections and interconnections? I was pleased to have been part of a group discussing "Ghar Wapsi and the ecumenical response," convened by Peniel Rajkumar, the World Council of Churches' programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, at the Princeton Theological Seminary in April 2015, where I drafted the following observations that I now offer:

- The ecumenical vision of understanding "the whole inhabited world" offering a house and home for all, is a vision that is in danger of perishing.
- We know that "without a vision, the people perish" and this is an all-too-apparent danger in a context where "returning home" seems to be a rallying cry which has resulted in all kinds of consequences.
- These consequences include
 - looking at people from certain religious backgrounds as being "outside" the house;
 - the assertion that such people cannot have the protection and security that those "inside" the house enjoy and are entitled to;
 - the claim that violence experienced by, and perpetuated upon, those considered outside the house is both justified and legitimate;
 - the call to "return" home leading to what is seen as a justifiable "reconversion" of those seen as converts and thus those who have been lured out of or have left the house.
- In response to this, certain realities stand out:
 - the intriguing posture of certain intellectual groups which seem to offer tacit support to such thinking;
 - the deliberate fermenting of insecurity among those who are confronted by this;
 - the role of the "mainstream" media in perpetuating certain stereotypes, including a particular way of using the term "mission" and "missionary";
 - the displaying of the fissures even with the tiny group, percentage-wise, of Christians in India, especially in terms of attempting to explain

the disproportionate violence faced by rural Dalit and Tribal communities;

- the reality that within ecclesial families in India, there is a sense of competition leading to certain claims and strategies of mission, conversion, and baptism, including the dissemination of such claims on social media and in the public square;
 - the legal moves narrowing the understanding of one's right to freely preach, profess, practice, and propagate one's religion and religious convictions;
 - the class-caste divide which denies agency to the most vulnerable within India's stratified society, leading to the ones who often have never had a home of their own where they belonged, rather than being "tolerated", being treated as objects rather than homeowners who can make choices.
- Our response to these and related realities include:
 - the need for more, not less, of respectful, honest, difficult, but necessary interfaith and intra-religious dialogue on issues related to conversion, reconversion, baptism, multiple religious belonging and the power of exclusive claims being urgent and pressing, exploring the reality, consequences, and significance of house/home claims and counter-claims;
 - overcoming over-simplification, naïve generalizations, pious denial of divisions and difference, and moving and striving toward the understanding of house/home being seen as the "household of God" where all should return, where all belong, and all find welcome.

Having gone through the exercise of trying to come to terms with Luther's last public words and wrestling with the legacy of what those words meant and mean in a context where "othering" seems to have become a given; where, in certain parts of the world, the victims of this othering are butchered in full public view with slickly produced videos documenting this in great and tragic detail, videos that people tend to watch briefly before moving on to the cute cat videos on the same screen; in a context where ennui takes hold before the next big thing like the photograph of Justin Bieber's naked backside going with the hashtag, "#Turn around," what are we to say about what we as Christians have inherited and what we as Christians experience? If we are the inheritors of a certain legacy, how does this square with another reality, that being in India, Jewish brothers and sisters have lived in peaceful harmony for hundreds of years without the horrible experiences (except for the external Mumbai terror attack in November 2008) that they have had in most other countries of the world? Did we as Indian Christians learn from our own complex legacy and become more tolerant of difference and otherness? How does our minority con-

sciousness in certain parts of the country go along with majoritarianism in certain states of North-East India? Does the claim of antiquity that the descendants of the St. Thomas Christians play a role in our positioning in the religious framework of India? What about more recent converts, especially those from the vulnerable and exploited sections of our society? When applied to contemporary Dalit movements, a perceptive commentator notes that

identity politics favored by Dalit groups have only resulted in fragmentation, thus distorting the agenda of emancipation. However muddled and complex the situation may be, the fact remains that the goals of all labouring masses are entangled. The real challenge lies in building solidarity without dissolving the specific concerns and differences of all the groups involved.²⁷

This is an important challenge that prevents us from giving in to despair with regard to what seems to be narrow individualism with multiple focii, preventing the actualization of attempts at honest solidarity.

Questions linger, but we need to come to terms and courageously address three things, hopefully not easily yielding to what Sahayadhas calls a "reactive" ecclesiology:²⁸

1. As those who are inheritors of intolerant attitudes, including our lack of fellowship, patience, toleration, and acceptance towards the vulnerable other, what have we learnt about pluralistic inclusiveness²⁹ in practical terms in local contexts?
2. As those who are receivers of intolerant attitudes, including the lack of fellowship, patience, toleration, and acceptance, and have come to see ourselves as the vulnerable other, what can we teach about pluralistic inclusiveness in practical terms in local contexts?
3. As those who are recipients of intolerant attitudes on the part of the arrogant, dominant, aggressive, "nationalist" forces, which include the lack of fellowship, patience, toleration, and acceptance, are there limits to pluralistic inclusiveness in practical terms in local contexts?

Notes

- 1 "I Slew the Seven Horses of the Chariots of the Sun," in *Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld – Poems 1972 – 2006* (ed. and trans. from Marathi, Dilip Chitre; Navayana Pub., 2007) 120–126 [122].
- 2 *A Smithsonian Magazine* review (February 2012) published on the occasion of the reissue of this book <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/visiting-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-third-reich-20231221/?all>

- analyzes why this “seminal” work continues to be of relevance and “important reading.” This article by Ron Rosenbaum forms part of the Introduction to the reissued volume.
- 3 Diarmaid MacCulloch, in his *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), writes: “Luther’s writing of 1543 [*On the Jews and their Lies*, among others] is a blueprint for the Nazis’ *Kristallnacht* of 1938. It recommends that in retaliation for Jewish obstinacy, synagogues should be burned, Jewish literature confiscated, Jewish teaching forbidden and vengeance taken for the killing of Christ” (690). Also, he makes a link with Europe’s famous humanist, Erasmus, who “set the tone for those who considered themselves in Europe’s intellectual vanguard by being a notable hater of Jews. He loaded onto them all his prejudices about ceremonial religion, plus his deep distrust of cabbala and other mystical literature” (689).
 - 4 A solid, broad, deep, and detailed survey is found in James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).
 - 5 See Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, eds., *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
 - 6 Erik W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012) 140. On Luther’s scatological way of thinking, arguing, and theologizing, see David Bagchi, “The German Rabelais? Foul Words and the Word in Luther,” in *Reformation and Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 7/2-3 (2005) 143-162, where we read: “Luther’s coarseness in general, and his use of scatological language in particular, might seem a trivial aspect of his life and work, but in fact it has had serious historiographical repercussions” (145).
 - 7 Arnold Ages, “Luther and the Rabbis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58/1 (1967) 63-68 [68]. This paper will not look at Luther’s writings on the “Turk”/the Muslims. One contribution regarding this is found in Adam S. Francisco, “Luther’s Knowledge of and Attitude Toward Islam,” in *The Routledge Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations* (ed. Mona Siddiqui; London and New York: Routledge, 2013) 129-153. Francisco is the author of *Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
 - 8 See <http://www.cmu.edu/randyslecture/> and Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture* (New York: Hyperion, 2008).
 - 9 Gritsch, *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism*, 96.
 - 10 Schramm and Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 200.
 - 11 All references are from Schramm and Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 200-202.
 - 12 On usury, see Charles R. Geisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor: A History of Usury and Debt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). A summary sentence states that “Luther also detested usury in line with his dislike of the papacy and all of its financial felonies, such as usury but mainly simony” (83).
 - 13 Schramm and Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 201 – 202. The German comes from the critical edition, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 51 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1914) 195–196 [196].
 - 14 Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (trans. Roy A. Harrisville; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, German original 1995) 345. The excursus forms chap 35, pp. 336-345. This disquiet with how serious and famous theologians have approached this aspect of Luther’s life and writings is echoed by Gritsch in *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism*, where he puzzles about Lohse treating “Luther’s attitude to the Jews only in a brief ‘excursus’; it was ‘exclusively religious’” (125). After surveying a variety and range of writings, Gritsch offers the following image: “The topic ‘Luther and the Jews’ is like a sea crowded with many vessels of various sizes, ranging from small boats to ocean liners – with an occasional warship! Some are steered well, others sail without reliable navigation, indeed, at times, colliding with each other, and a few land on a deserted island, sometimes damaged by warlike critique.” (128). An example of vacillation on Luther and the Jews is found in the conclusion of a book purporting to deal with this topic, where the author writes: “Given the conventions of our 20th century and a sensitivity toward the sin of racism, we may have some regrets about Luther’s counsel against the Jews and his earthy vigor of expressions. Whatever failings he had, and he freely admitted that they were many, he kept his integrity to the end.” (Neelak S. Tjernagel, *Martin Luther and the Jewish People* [Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985] 100-101. “Some” regrets?! How does one define “integrity” given what words were spoken at the end? In the very last paragraph of this book, the author unblushingly and almost approvingly notes that “We, too, observe, as Luther did in his day, that the Jewish people reject Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah” (101). Does this mean that the attempts at the near-annihilation of the Jewish people in the mid-twentieth century is somehow justified? In his Preface, this author writes: “In our own time the holocaust in Germany and the civil rights movement in America have sensitized us to the injustice and indignity of racism in any form. It is not strange, therefore, that among Luther’s writings his diatribes against the Jews should be the occasion for offense in the eyes of the contemporary world. We feel no compulsion, however, either to condemn or condone Luther’s outbursts” (xi). How’s that for fudging the issue in the guise of historical objectivity, where the author wants to “try to understand the historical setting, the conventions of his time, and the basic motives and convictions behind what he said and wrote” (xi)?
 - 15 For a fine overview and analysis of this see Kirsi Stjerna, *No Greater Jewel: Thinking about Baptism with Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2009), and Mark D. Tranvik, “Luther on Baptism,” in *Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (ed. Timothy J. Wengert; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 23-37.
 - 16 See Kirsi Stjerna, “Luther and His Jewish Conversation Partners: Insights for Thinking About Conversion, Baptism, and Saving Faith,” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 40/5 (2013) 319-325 [332]. The comment follows Stjerna’s analysis of a 1530 letter from Luther to a Lutheran pastor, where he “offers advice on how to proceed with the request from a young Jewish girl who wishes to be baptized” (330).
 - 17 Stjerna, “Luther and His Jewish Conversation Partners,” 329.
 - 18 Martin Luther, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45 (ed. Walther I. Brandt and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press 1962) 199-229, with Introduction on pp. 197-198. Sections of this are reprinted in Schramm and Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*, 76-83. Carter Lindberg notes what he calls “Luther’s initial departure from the anti-Jewish legacy” displayed in this tract, but goes on to state: “Tragically and shamefully, Luther by the end of his life raged against the Jews and advised destruction of their homes, synagogues, and books as well as prohibition of Jewish civil rights. In light of Nazi use of these later so-called anti-Jewish writings, it is important to emphasize that Luther as well as other evangelical and Roman Catholic writers must be seen in their historical context [...] and more importantly, that Luther’s animus toward the Jews was theological and not racist.” (idem, *The European Reformations* 2nd ed.; [Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010] 365-366.) I’m not at all convinced about the “theological” versus “racist” arguments, and wonder, too, about characterizing some of these writings as “so-called”!
 - 19 The section above is paraphrased and quoted from *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 229.
 - 20 See James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, where he writes: “That Jews, for their part, roundly rejected Luther’s overture was part of what caused his bitter attack later [...] Nothing generates Christian fury like the Jewish refusal, especially if what is refused is self-defined Christian kindness. But that rejection was only one factor in Luther’s growing disenchantment with Jews, a disenchantment that would fester into a venomous hatred” (367). Carroll also explores the links between Luther’s approach to the Catholics and the Jews, and notes: “But when he was charged by allies of the pope with propounding a Jewish heresy, Luther reacted by lumping Jews and the pope together as his mortal enemies [...]” (367).
 - 21 See, among others, J. Paul Rajashekar, “Lutheranism in Asia and the Indian Subcontinent,” in *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (ed. Arland Jacobsen and James Aageson; Minneapolis: Augsburg

- Fortress, 2008) 61-76; “Rethinking Lutheran Engagement with Religious Plurality,” in *Transformative Theological Perspectives* (ed. Karen L. Bloomquist; Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009) 105-116; Edmond Yee and J. Paul Rajashekar, eds., *Abundant Harvest: Stories of Asian Lutherans* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013); “Luther as a Resource for Christian Dialogue with Other World Religions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingle and L’Uboimir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 435-446.
- 22 Henry S. Wilson, *The Speaking God: Luther’s Theology of Preaching* (Madras: United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, 1982); “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” in Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedrmans, 2009) 100-116.
- 23 Santosh J. Sahayadoss, *Martin Luther on Social and Political Issues: His Relevance for Church and Society in India* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006).
- 24 R. Sahayadhas, *Hindu Nationalism and the Indian Church: Towards an Ecclesiology in Conversation with Martin Luther* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2013).
- 25 Rudolf C. Heredia, “Ghar Wapsi: Political Agenda, Religious Garb,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 50/3 (January 17, 2015) 17-20 [20].
- 26 Anand Teltumbde, “Ghar Wapsi: Welcome to the Hellhole of Hinduism,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 50/1 (January 3, 2015) 10-11 [11]. Also see the comment by Manjari Katju, in “The Politics of Ghar Wapsi,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 50/1 (January 3, 2015) 21-24: “This ghar wapsi is largely a de-Islamisation or de-Christianisation rather than imbuing the reconverts with Hindu spiritual or *shastric* knowledge” [23].
- 27 V.S. Sreedhara, “Human Rights, Dalit Questions and Subaltern Studies in India,” in *Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India* (ed. Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey; New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2014) 77-102 [98].
- 28 R. Sahayadhas, *Hindu Nationalism and the Indian Church*, 376.
- 29 The term was explored incisively by K.P. Aleaz. A “summary” of what he worked on in other places is found in his “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A Suggested Perspective in Theology of Religions,” *Asian Christian Review* 2/1 (2008) 43-49. My engagement with Aleaz is found in “Overcoming Ignorance and Arrogance: Public Theology in a Multicultural Context,” in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulse Aleaz* (ed. V.J. John; Delhi: ISPCK, 2010) 320-329.

J. Jayakiran Sebastian is a Presbyterian of the Church of South India. He serves as Co-Dean and the H. George Anderson Professor of Mission and Cultures at United Lutheran Seminary. He has served as Professor in the Department of Theology and Ethics at the United Theological College, Bangalore, where he was also Chairperson of the Department and Dean of Doctoral Studies. His M.Th is from the Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture, Kerala (Senate of Serampore College). His Dr. Theol., magna cum laude is from University of Hamburg, Germany.

How We were Joined

Maria Erling

A pastor, Samuel Simon Schmucker, and a lawyer, Thaddeus Stevens, later famous as the abolitionist representative to Congress from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, laid the foundations for the seminary that located in Gettysburg, in 1826.¹ These promoters seized on a nationwide push to create modern educational institutions suited to the democratic age. The new country demanded a dramatic increase in the ranks of ministers, doctors, and lawyers for the expanding population of Americans founding new settlements and towns in “the West.” Like the law schools and medical schools that also developed professional standards and educational programs to go with them, ministers also needed more systematic training. Gettysburg seminary, a denominational, theological seminary also enthusiastically participated in reform movements like abolition and temperance, and especially the powerful missionary movement. Everyone in America was moving, and new settlers and a frontier challenges demanded a response from the churches. Samuel Simon Schmucker convinced enough churches to organize themselves into united synods so that together they could do much more to advance God’s kingdom.

The pioneer professor of theology, Samuel Simon Schmucker, had himself been trained in this time of transition, studying Lutheran theology first with other students under his father, a minister, and then reading theology at the young Princeton Theological Seminary, a choice that fed his conviction that more demanding study and the adaptation of modern methods to advance the cause of Christianity would greatly benefit the nation. He set about his task of starting a seminary by first organizing ministers and churches into a General Synod, a national body of Lutheran churches that also included lay delegates. Not all regional synods agreed to join this synod, in 1820. Many were wary that such an organization would be coercive, or assess taxes, or stipulate forms of worship. Schmucker wrote the constitution for the Synod with these reservations in mind. His efforts aligned with the

interests of those ministers and congregations that sought to adopt church governance that reflected the democratic impulses of the new nation.

The location of the seminary in Gettysburg, nevertheless met opposition right from the start. Some favored locating the seminary near a university. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania had been formed through more rudimentary convocations of ministers closer to Philadelphia already in 1748, and provided for an educated ministry through alliances with the university in the city. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's son-in-law John Christopher Kunze taught theology to students in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania, where he had an appointment as a German Professor. The reluctance of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania to fully support the development of a seminary in Gettysburg registered their preference for the arrangements like that with Kunze, and with other pious German professors who served to instruct students in Lutheran Theology, like the Halle trained Johan Christoph Helmuth. These professors already had churches and buildings at their disposal and could make a livelihood by charging students directly.

And Schmucker's seminary was controversial for another reason: it was dedicated to instruction in English. Lutheran churches in the early 1800s, and especially in Philadelphia, had not given up on the German language as the language for Lutherans in America. They resisted new methods and movements. While the urgent calls for ministers to serve in frontier settings rippled through the ministerium and synodical meetings, German advocates noted that the call must also be heard for German speaking pastors for new German immigrants. Maintaining their foundational commitment to maintaining the high standards of German scholarship, and German theology, and the German language, they provided a consistent voice that strove in high tension with reforming impulses coming from the Evangelical Protestant English speaking promoters in Gettysburg and Maryland. As a counter to the activist style initiated by Schmucker, strong advocates for a German, university-oriented model proposed working with the German Reformed churches to support a seminary that would do its instruction in German. They urged joining the work of Lancaster Theological Seminary, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Lutheran Theological Seminary began in 1826 as a project that had to continually make a case for itself, and prove its way.

The Pennsylvania Ministerium had a strong voice, but not a veto over the commencement of the educational program in 1826. The venture to found a seminary based on the reformist agenda of Schmucker went ahead without the endorsement of the Ministerium. They held back funds and encouragement, but in 1833, a "Second Professor" came to Gettysburg, to teach both at the college and the seminary. His salary later became the responsibility of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, which after failing in 1850 to establish their own seminary, provided funds for a German professor, and named Charles Philip Krauth to this task. His son, Charles Porterfield Krauth, later instrumental in the founding of the Philadelphia Seminary, was on the Ministerium's committee approving this appoint-

ment.² While church leaders maneuvered through the tensions growing between the more German, and conservative impulses within the Pennsylvania Ministerium and the more avid reformist impulses within the more western synods, more immigrants came to the United States, bringing with them new theological and cultural emphases. And making it more difficult for one seminary, with limited resources, to address every concern to the satisfaction of every party.

While Lutherans divided over how these cultural and social issues should define them, they also shared the challenge of figuring out how Lutheranism should speak to a new nation. They wrangled over the question: should Lutherans accept the role of a separate ethnic community or should Lutherans share with other Americans the evangelical task of conversion, reform, and refinement?

Lutherans were in on the ground floor of the work to establish denominational institutions when they founded a seminary in 1826. And students at the seminary, from the beginning, acted on their cutting-edge commitments. The driving impulse for them was missionary work, on the frontier, in the countryside, in local congregations, and on foreign shores. Starting with the first term, the students met once a month as "The Society of Inquiry on Missions," corresponding with students at Andover, Princeton, Pittsburgh, and Hartwick, with the missionary society at Basel, Switzerland, and later with the Lutheran seminaries in South Carolina, and in Ohio. Two essays each month were assigned in rotation, and students went out preaching, wrote reports about the destitute state of religion in the country, and remarkably in 1835 resolved to support "the theological education of a suitable, free, coloured man, so that he could become a Lutheran minister."³ That is how Daniel Alexander Payne became the first African American to be educated for the ministry in an American theological seminary.

Students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary came from all corners of the Eastern seaboard; many students from Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland probably resisted Schmucker's outspoken views against slave holding. Even though the missionary society had funded a scholarship for an African American student, this was envisioned as a missionary investment to provide a minister trained to provide services for the needy freed slave population. The language of inclusivity was unknown in the 19th century. Further, serious theological differences among Lutherans surfaced in the 1840s after a renewal of interest and commitment to the Lutheran Confessional texts began to define factions within the growing Lutheran tent. Within the faculty of three professors at the Lutheran Theological Seminary opposing views on theology and church practice pushed students to take sides. German and English factions were part of the mix, as were social views on slavery and other reform-related issues, but the main difficulty that affected the calm at Gettysburg concerned differences over the authority of Lutheran Confessions for defining Lutheran teaching in America. Schmucker and others who styled themselves as "American" Lutherans sought to adapt the Lutheranism to the American context and join with other

Evangelical churches, all the better to form a united Protestant front against Roman Catholic influence. Against that tendency a “conservative” Lutheran faction rallied around the charismatic leadership of Charles Porterfield Krauth, whose father then served as professor at the seminary, and was also for a time Gettysburg College’s president.

The younger Krauth had served as pastor in West Virginia, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, and wrote articles in the Lutheran newspaper, *Evangelical Review*, that assumed leadership of the conservative theological confessional movement, a struggling and contentious party of American Lutherans who recognized the need for a new alignment among Lutherans. They looked hopefully at the arrival of Lutheran immigrants more intent on a purified Lutheranism and averse to evangelical alliances of any sort, who had begun to come to America. German Lutherans ready to stay German, and committed to a Lutheran identity based on a strict adherence to the full Book of Concord formed synods of their own: Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo, Wisconsin, and Missouri. Norwegian Lutherans, influenced by this same confessionalism, also came to Iowa, and aligned themselves with Missouri Lutherans. None of these Lutheran groups recognized the American Lutheran party that developed around Gettysburg, and the sister seminary in Wittenberg, Ohio, as truly Lutheran, and they were confirmed in these views by growing controversy within the ranks of the General Synod.

A new platform for more conservative voices appeared in 1850, when the *Evangelical Review* launched its work in Gettysburg to directly counter the dominance of Baltimore’s *Lutheran Observer*. William Reynolds, as editor of the *Review*, assembled an editorial board that consisted of key figures in the Gettysburg constituency who pushed for a more confessional consciousness. An all-out newspaper war of words ensued, and attacks on venerable figures, especially Schmucker, became public. Editor Reynolds, after several heated print exchanges, had this to say: “The fact is there is a large body of men in our Church who have no knowledge of her history, no sympathy with her doctrines, no idea of her true character, and whose whole conception of the Church is that of a kind of mongrel Methodist Presbyterianism, and of this party Drs. S.S. Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz [editor of the *Observer*] are the coryphaei.”⁴

Things got worse, especially after the anonymously written recension of the Augsburg Confession, *The Definite Platform* was distributed to pastors in the General Synod. (Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz in Baltimore and Samuel Sprecher in Wittenberg, Ohio were rightly assumed to be the authors.) The 1855 document “corrected errors” in the Augsburg Confession, such as its approval of the ceremonies of the mass, and the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Though the platform solicited a response or adoption by the constituent synods, it met immediate scorn from conservatives in the Midwest, and alarm from moderates and conservatives of the General Synod. Charles Porterfield Krauth, Beale Schmucker [liturgical scholar⁵], and Charles W. Schaeffer [avid promoter of German language for theological study] who pressed their ministerial colleagues to assume a firmer confessional foundation.

The Civil War interrupted this upheaval within the ministerial ranks. War came to Gettysburg, and Southern Lutherans left the school. The war’s cause, slavery, seemed not to figure in the war of words separating the Lutheran confessional factions, at least not directly. Many of the synods had adopted the practice in the national legislature, a gag rule on any discussion of the issue of slavery. Within the General Synod no discussion of slavery happened until after secession. It could be that the intense agitation over political questions naturally made theological differences more intense, and willingness for accommodating differences less possible.

Immigrant Lutherans complicated the story of American Lutheran development, and challenged the presumption that American Lutheranism should be defined by the Eastern Lutheran experience. Swedish Lutherans cooperating with General Synod leaders in Illinois left to form their own Augustana Synod in 1860, and started the official institutional exodus from the General Synod and the theological stance of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. In 1864 Samuel Simon Schmucker retired and the seminary board could then name a new leading professor. The favorite of the conservatives, Charles Porterfield Krauth, had too combative a reputation, unacceptable to the proponents of a broader evangelical Lutheranism, and his name was not even presented to the board. A more moderate candidate, the Rev. J.A. Brown had earlier spoken out against *The Definite Platform*, and gained the board’s support. This did not satisfy the circles around the conservative Charles Porterfield Krauth. They formed a new Lutheran seminary with faculty drawn from Gettysburg, among whom was Charles W. Schaeffer, who moved to Philadelphia to be a professor there, while he had three weeks earlier promised the Gettysburg board that he would remain. Schaeffer’s abrupt departure felt like a betrayal. Together with Krauth, the Philadelphia circle also worked to establish a counterpart to the General Synod. Starting something new, the General Council, provided an American, conservative confessionalism that they hoped would attract like-minded Lutheran traditionalists in the Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Augustana Synods.

The city of Philadelphia provided an excellent place for theological study, even though the hoped-for convergence of confessional Lutheranism on the foundation of the General Council never came into fruition. Eastern Lutherans were too worldly, too familiar with leaders of other Protestant denominations, too willing to participate in public witness alongside civic leaders to provide an appealing platform that other Midwestern Lutheran church bodies would join. As newer arrivals to America, and faced with the condescension that older American Lutheran churches too often assumed when they approached the ‘ethnic’ Lutherans, they stayed apart. In spite of this hesitancy, many students from these groups relied especially on the Philadelphia Seminary to provide an education. Danish, Norwegian, German, Swedish, and Finnish seminary students, who had received their basic education from their own denominational seminaries, went to Philadelphia to get accredited theological degrees. This legacy of the Philadelphia seminary created bonds between Midwestern conservative churches and Eastern Lutherans through personal friendship.⁶

The two seminaries in Pennsylvania defined themselves against each other. Which was more Lutheran, more confessional, more socially active and missionary-oriented? Was an urban setting more conducive to theological education, or less? Were faculty members at Philadelphia or Gettysburg better known? Even after the General Council, General Synod, and the United Synod of the South reunited in 1918, the competition between Gettysburg and Philadelphia continued. Each school made choices to keep themselves distinct, defined themselves as urban vs rural, ecumenical vs evangelical, academic vs pastoral, or socially committed vs liturgically tuned.⁷ Within each school the typical academic and personal ferment that can only exist within a small community led to sometimes debilitating rancor and spite. There are stories that should be forgotten, too.

Through it all, other Midwestern Lutherans did not really understand or appreciate the differences in what was essentially a family fight. When the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) formed in 1918, reasons to keep the schools apart became more pronounced, not less. Theological education in a city enhanced ministry, and institutions in Philadelphia relied on the seminary, including a deaconess house and publishing house, while church headquarters for the ULCA were in nearby New York City. Gettysburg's location, closer to Baltimore and Washington, D.C. than to Philadelphia, was positioned to be in service to a national Lutheran witness, even while it served a rural and small town constituency. The seminary and supported congregations and institutions, like the Baltimore Deaconess House with its impressive record of social service and pioneered in bringing the first female professor at any seminary, Bertha Paulssen, to its campus and introducing courses in social science to seminary students.

Attempts to bring the schools together, however, made sense to other leaders. In the 20th century the seminaries, now joined in the United Lutheran Church in America, faced pressure from a united church constituency. The federated structure of the ULCA, however, prevented much from happening. It took 21 years for the two regional synods in the middle of the Pennsylvania [General Council and General Synod judicatories] to merge into the powerful Central Pennsylvania Synod. Merger of the two seminaries appealed to the rational mind, but not to the loyalty of alumni. Perceiving that a unification would strengthen the seminary's faculty and the church's public witness, the separate boards of Gettysburg and Philadelphia raised motions in 1926 and 1931 to consider merger, but not until 1958, when new merger commissions were bringing together the Lutheran Church in America, did the boards established a joint commission that would consider merger as one possibility for the future.

What made the joint commission pay attention was another driving factor for merger in the late 1950s: the advanced deterioration of facilities in Philadelphia.

The centenary of the Philadelphia Seminary approached in 1964, and the board began a fundraising appeal for an endowment, even while persistent external pressure from the

newly merged Lutheran Church in America (LCA) included the commission of a study of theological education authored by Conrad Bergendoff. He had spent two student years at Philadelphia Seminary, and maintained a longstanding friendship with A.R. Wentz. Regarding Gettysburg and Philadelphia, his commission advised that a move to a new facility near the University of Pennsylvania, should be seriously considered as an option for both schools. Such a venture could be modeled after the relocation of the faculties of Augustana, Western, Maywood, Suomi, and Grand View seminaries into the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (LSTC), in the early sixties.

Surprisingly for Gettysburg, the 1963 centennial of the famous Civil War battle seemed not to be much of a factor in the deliberations. No one explored the symbolic role Gettysburg provided for the articulation of a Lutheran witness to the nation. Instead, the urban, and especially the university context, was promoted as being better able to provide the ideal setting for a Lutheran theological education, since it gained for the church's efforts to form ministers the full exposure to the arts and sciences, as well as a more multicultural and ecumenical environment.

Given these parameters a working group emerged to consider plans for a new campus near the University of Pennsylvania, a plan already envisioned by Philadelphia's board as a way to resolve their need for updated facilities. A new campus required significant new resources even beyond funds already been raised through Philadelphia's 100th anniversary campaign. In the middle of all of this, the president of Philadelphia retired. Gettysburg seminary also had a transition, electing Donald Heiges to assume the presidency of their school. After the Philadelphia board voted to relocate the Philadelphia seminary to land adjacent to the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia board asked Heiges if he would also serve as president of Philadelphia, and this he agreed to do.

Fundraising for a merged school near a university became mired in difficulty because land could not be found at a reasonable price putting concrete planning on hold. Though Philadelphia authorized a \$5 million campaign, and urged Gettysburg supporters to join them should their board also decide to relocate, uncertainty remained. Gettysburg's constituency contributed funds to go towards a merged school, but definite plans hinged on future decisions yet to be made. The Philadelphia board proposed another merger plan, and a joint commission considered possible sites from Washington, DC, to New England. But Gettysburg's board voted against relocation in 1970, and as a fall back the commission proposed "structured cooperation." Dr. Heiges had had enough by this time, and resigned the joint presidency to stay on as president at Gettysburg, making such cooperation more difficult. Since funds raised for relocation plans within the Gettysburg ranks were almost inextricably mingled with the joint funds for Philadelphia's endowment, a good deal of resentment lingered in Gettysburg over the purported confiscation of their resources for the sole use of Philadelphia.

During these tumultuous years, Gettysburg leaders also developed ecumenical and programmatic relationships with theological schools in Washington, D.C., making relocation to Philadelphia less desirable to them. They would have preferred a relocation of both schools to the capital. A similar and successful relocation done by the newly United Methodists from a rural campus in Westminster, Maryland to a site near American University [Wesley Seminary], showed the promise of a strong presence in the nation's capital. Together with Catholic University, Howard University, and Virginia Theological Seminary, Gettysburg's leaders envisioned a bright future for a strong urban, ecumenical, and university context near at hand. The Washington Theological Consortium gave Gettysburg a programmatic extension in the city.

A more significant development than a programmatic exposure to the city, however, is represented by the approach to the Philadelphia seminary by leaders hoping to provide excellent theological education for leaders in the Black Church. What resulted was the formation of the Urban Theological Institute in 1980 providing courses both in congregations and on the Philadelphia campus. The history of the relationship between the Urban Theological Institute UTI and the Philadelphia seminary is one of increasing cooperation and closer alignment of goals and methods. In the new configuration that process of integration now includes students at two campuses as well as at St. Paul's Baptist Church in Philadelphia. Committed to providing theological education for a constituency located and committed to the work of the church in the city has resulted in a lively program for ecumenical and cultural exchange. Theological education happens through the joint work of faculty immersed in scholarship, working pastors honing their craft, seminary students asking new questions, dynamic congregations, and civic leaders all determined to make the city a place for a powerful witness from the church. The ecumenical structure of the UTI has been integrated into the story of the Philadelphia seminary, but a more complete historical accounting of the relationship, and the prospects for the way that this important part of the Philadelphia constituency might purposely relate to the United Lutheran Seminary is yet to be discovered, owned, and advanced.

Since the turn of the millennium, the two schools developed a strong working relationship through the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries, and through intentional efforts to build relationships among faculty and administrative staff. Shared programs – a D.Min. degree, Diaconal Ministry Formation, Theological Education with Youth (TEY) and Project Connect, funded by the Lilly Endowment – resulted in significant outreach to youth and young adults. The past two decades have been a time of experimenting and risk taking, each school striving to extend their mission even though resources, and student numbers declined. During this time the decision to work more closely together was also prompted by the clear signal from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that the seminaries would have to ensure their future health on their own; that the national church would continue its commitment to theological education, but this would not be enough to cover

short falls in funding. This was a clear signal that new arrangements were needed to ensure the continuing heritage of these two schools based on the Eastern Lutheran tradition.

The ecumenical scene has also affected the prospects of theological schools in very positive ways making for a much less polarized, in-house dynamic as leaders consider the future of theological education in the Mid-Atlantic. The faculty of United Lutheran Seminary reflects the ecumenical traditions of Lutheran, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Black Church traditions, Baptist, and Presbyterian traditions. Partnerships within the Washington Consortium, with Yale Divinity School, and with Union Theological Seminary in New York, make for expanded opportunities for all the students and faculty.

Gettysburg and Philadelphia share this common history, but the spirit for a common enterprise is no longer a vision but an actuality that is being put on the ground, and instilled in the classroom, and advanced through the alumni network. A more intentionally collaborative spirit in the faculty, staff, board, and administration could do much to undo the historic and dispiriting pattern of competition that has been so prominent at times in the history of the seminary. All that can be done to advance a fuller understanding of the particular and unique gifts of each school can make possible the work to bring on board the widespread constituency of students and alums. Together the United Lutheran Seminary can do more for the church, which needs the strong tradition of Eastern Lutheranism to make its voice heard as a witness within the public sphere, and its ecumenical and civic experience to be more forcefully present. It will be the task of the future to identify and secure the signature contributions of each tradition, and to help to foster a living awareness of the scholarly and pastoral legacies that have made such a mark in the annals of the churches of the Eastern Lutheran branch of American Lutheranism.

Notes

- 1 Abdel Ross Wentz, *History of the Gettysburg Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States and of the United Lutheran Church in America, Gettysburg Pennsylvania, 1826-1926 [Hereafter History of Gettysburg Seminary]*, United Lutheran Publication House, Spruce Street, Philadelphia, 1926 gives a comprehensive and exhaustive account of the many people and parties that helped to launch the seminary and the college.
- 2 Ibid, pp. 138, 172-3.
- 3 The papers of the Society are in the archives at the Gettysburg campus, and selected recitations are available online.
- 4 Quoted in Wentz, *History of Gettysburg Seminary*, p. 165.
- 5 Beal Melancthon Schmucker, son of Samuel Simon Schmucker and Mary Catharine Steenbergen, 1847 graduate of Gettysburg Seminary.
- 6 My grandfather, Laurence Siersbeck, came from Trinity Seminary in Blair Nebraska, to Philadelphia in 1927. He took as his own motto for ministry "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" from the Mt. Airy campus sun dial.

- 7 Sometimes the roles were reversed, although I have not found any source that argued that Philadelphia was the more rural seminary. Gettysburg's constituency, by virtue of their program in Washington, D.C. did claim an urban ethos.

Maria Erling is Professor of Modern Church History and Global Mission at United Lutheran Seminary where she also guides ministerial leadership placements. Her A.B. is from Augustana College, her M.Div. is from Yale Divinity School. Her Th.D. is from Harvard Divinity School. Erling has authored numerous articles and chapters in books about contemporary Lutheranism, ecumenism, and mainline Protestantism, and coauthored with Mark Granquist, The Augustana Story.

From Namibia: The Global March of the Reformation

John Spangler

Here We Journey

Holding its 12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, in May of 2017, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) both commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and gathered under the theme “Liberated by Grace” in distinctively contemporary ways.

The assembly – nearly 400 delegates from 145 churches in the communion – and hundreds more visitors, including 10 students and a professor from (Gettysburg Seminary, now) United Lutheran Seminary, participated as visitors in the 12th Assembly, attending plenary sessions, and meeting frequently as a class to debrief and reflect together. It was my privilege to accompany the Gettysburg group and serve as seconded staff in the LWF Communication unit.

There, the class and a thousand others witnessed what the Lutheran World Federation was aiming for in this anniversary year observance. Ralston (Ralie) Defenbaugh, Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, offered three overarching observations of what the assembly needed to signal: First, “the Reformation is a global citizen” and not confined to Wittenberg or Central Europe, or the North. Secondly, “It is polycentric, not centered in one part of the world, but has many centers,” and “the Reformation” he said, “is ongoing.”¹

General Secretary Martin Junge, Lutheran theologian from Chile, spotlighted the dynamic nature of this Reformation observation, saying “Here we stand, or should we say, here we journey, at the closing of a rich and meaningful chapter of history of 500 years of Reformation, and almost 2,000 years of being the church. Here we journey, ready to put our feet into the next century.”

Theology that still Liberates

A powerful, overarching theme “Liberated by God’s Grace,” was joined to three strong sub themes: “Salvation, Not for Sale;” “Human Beings, Not for Sale;” and “Creation, Not for Sale.” The first asserted the central core of the Lutheran contribution to Christianity, that we are justified by grace through faith. “Salvation, Not for Sale” echoes the 16th century struggle Luther delivered with the problem surrounding indulgences, creating a payment for time off in purgatory and confusing the clear message of the God’s Gospel truth that there is nothing we can do to manipulate, or even hasten the mercy of God. This anchoring “fact” of faith, that we are saved by grace through faith alone, brings forward the understanding of justification in the Lutheran tradition into the world that speaks mostly in the language of economics and the marketplace.

“Human Beings, Not for Sale” represents brings the Reformation forward into a world in which human trafficking remains a global scourge. A record number of global refugees lack permanent and sustainable homes. The LWF is leading partner with UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees) to provide direct support to over 1.2 million refugees in terms of basic needs like food, water, education, shelter in Uganda and can thus supply reliable information from those in flight and their encampments from many critical locations around the globe. “Host community residents offer their land for refugee settlement, and they don’t consider them refugees but brothers in need,” said Jesse Kamstra, LWF Country Representative in Uganda and Burundi. Kamstra knows that the high level of credibility follows the LWF’s particular commitment for refugee families. “LWF ensures that refugees receive education, even secondary school in most of its country programs. We are educating and preparing refugees to develop and manage their countries when they eventually return back to peaceful homes,” said Kamstra, who also said “It is absurd that some countries close their doors to refugees.”²

Delegates and visitors did not suffer from the scarcity of water in Namibia, thanks to the generosity of a Namibian farmer by the name of Finkenstein who donated all the water used in the assembly. But they did not fail to grasp the fact that the creation, like salvation and human beings, is not for sale. Martin Kopp, former LWF staffer and graduate student in economics at the University of Strasbourg, stated clearly that people buy land, minerals and natural resources all the time. Creation, Not for Sale, allows Lutherans to recapture their creedal confession, especially the first article, that God is “the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” That salvation itself is not narrowly limited to the souls of human beings, but includes the entire web of creation in the scope of redemption. Kopp also emphasized the fact that human beings are creatures of economy and markets, the environment is also part of the system of economics, and must be seen and resolved in the realistic condition of the modern global economic realities. Kopp summarized his point, saying “We do not own the earth and all that is in it, but are creatures ourselves. We are not the

masters of nature, but God’s children entrusted with the wellbeing of God’s creation. We cannot possess and exploit, but shall cultivate and guard.”³

The Reformation is Polycentric

Facing an anniversary of the 16th Century Reformation, five full centuries later, one could have imagined the Lutheran World Federation making the choice to meet in Germany, perhaps in one of the cities associated with Luther, or significant historical geography related to the Reformer. But in a 2013 meeting of the LWF Council in Wittenberg, then Dean of the Gettysburg Seminary Robin Steinke raised her green voting card joining the vast majority of her fellow Council members in accepting the invitation from Namibia to host the Twelfth Assembly of the global communion to take place in the 500th anniversary year of the Lutheran Reformation.

Why Namibia and not Germany? Why Africa and not another continent? If, as Defenbaugh noted, the Reformation as a global citizen can feel at home in many places around the world, it could have been many places. Stuttgart was the last host, and so it made sense to head to the global south. And, it was Africa’s turn, 40 years after the assembly first came to the continent in Dar Es Salaam. ⁴ Namibia offered a spectrum of history and geography: painful history with a century old genocide, decades of racism and segregated apartheid government, a sometimes violent transition to independence, drought and development, and a triad of Lutheran church bodies completely intertwined in it all.

Reformation is Ongoing

At the 11th Assembly (Stuttgart 2010), the churches of the Stuttgart region offered a dramatic review of their own region’s experience rebuilding the church in the [modern] period, including the difficult and controversial parts of the second world war. Real history always offers both pride and pain. Likewise, one of the striking aspects of being in Namibia is the difficult history of the treatment of native peoples by German colonial rule in the very early 20th century. The Nama and the Herero peoples were subjugated, deeply abused and suffered the first organized genocides of the new century. The calls for justice, reconciliation and restitution are sensitive if not controversial in Namibia. In fact, there was a possibility that there would be no statement, no acknowledgement of the painful part of the back story. In the end, the assembly adopted a nine-point statement entitled “Reconciliation with respect to Genocide in Namibia.”⁵

The statement tapped what the LWF knows from similar experiences around the world “that painful memories won’t go away until they are addressed. Only when the truth has been told and justice is sought can genuine reconciliation over the pains of the past take

place.” The statement continued, “We are encouraged to know that the Namibian and German governments have taken up this pain and are committed to a process of telling the truth and doing justice in view of what they both call today a genocide against the Herero, Nama and other indigenous people.” The statement concluded that the Germans and Namibians “through their dialogue process need to identify and agree on how the history will be told, how justice will be done, and how reconciliation will be promoted,” and the assembly committed the communion to accompanying them in their dialogue.

One of the keynote addresses most appreciated by our delegation of students was delivered by Dr. Denis Mukwege, a medical doctor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and one of the strongest advocates for gender justice on the African continent. The surgeon described his work with women who have suffered from violence, particularly sexual violence. In the midst of threats to his own safety, including the kidnapping of his own daughter, the stories of his life and work inspired awe and renewed commitment on the part of the those gathered to advocate for peace and gender justice in pursuit of a vision of a safer, more productive and inclusive way of life. LWF launched a policy pamphlet on gender justice⁶ in response to long history of encounters filled with stories like Mukwege’s, as well as the ongoing work on issues important to women globally. The Nobel nominee founded Panzi Hospital, which has treated tens of thousands of patients, where he specializes in reparative surgery.

The assembly included an in between space called the Omatala (marketplace in Oshiwambo) and was the place for encounters, creativity, transformative action, visioning and story-telling. There the Global Young Reformers Network set up shop for the assembly, occupying a corner of the large tent, and creating networking space that represented the ways that Young Reformers are taken seriously by LWF. They have represented the Lutheran community at the Conference of Parties [COP] addressing Climate Change that have been held in Copenhagen, Lima, and more recently in Paris. Caroline Bader, responsible for the youth work of the communion, organizes the international convening of young reformers so that they may bear witness to what is at stake for the future, to hope and faith, and especially the issues related to climate justice.

Other “in between” moments provided highlights of networking with familiar leaders from North America, such as a memorable lunch with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Presiding Bishop Eaton, two synod bishops, and several ELCA church-wide staff members. A wide-ranging conversation between students and the ELCA delegation explored how to nurture and extend global views of the church’s work when it is challenging to develop interest in the mission beyond the congregation. Students met with newly elected President Musa Pantu Filibus, a bishop from Nigeria. They chased coffee, gathered for debriefings, took a day in the park to see African animal life in the desert, listened and watched, and took in everything around them.

A climactic moment in the 12th assembly was the Global Commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in a five hour festival worship service on Sunday, May 14th. The thousand members of the assembly were joined by more than 9,000 Namibians in Sam Nujoma Stadium in Katutura, a township in northern Windhoek. A notable irony is that the name Katutura means “the place where people do not want to live” in Herero. In 1961, Black Africans were forcibly relocated to this township to make space for urban redevelopment in Windhoek. Bishop Zephania Kameeta, preacher for the sun-drenched service, noted that his ministry began in the township decades earlier. Since 2015, Kameeta has been Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, and for decades seen as a leader in both the church and an independent Namibia. In his preaching, he challenged every quarter of the globe with probing specificity about those forces that enslave us, from the struggles to overcome racism on the way to an independent Namibia, to the pride of the European culture, to the economic greed of the West. Every people and every church need the liberating power of the Gospel. “We will not give up and will never quit,” he said, “because we firmly believe that hatred, violence, greed, the growing gap between rich and poor, abject poverty, injustice, exploitation, terrorism, extremism, discrimination and death, do not have the last word.”⁷

Readings and prayers were offered by ecumenical representatives from all over the globe, a worship event made vibrant by the music of a dozen choirs from Lutheran congre-



May 13, 2017, Windhoek, Namibia: The Young Reformers occupied a corner of the Omatala, an open space at the Lutheran World Federation’s Twelfth Assembly, for exhibitions, workshops, and informal encounters. Photo by LWF/Johan Celine Valeriano.

gations in Namibia. Worshipers lined up at fifty communion stations in the stadium to receive the Eucharist. “This large, international group of worshippers more than anything shows how the church is alive, and the Reformation is ongoing,” said LWF General Secretary Martin Junge.

The deepest imprint in this manifestation of the ongoing Reformation were provided by a new generation of emerging leaders, be it young reformers, the talented photography team, the seminary students mixing in at every session, the actors and dancers in the daily liturgies, the resounding choirs, and the stunningly strong leapers (see the journal’s cover photo). One seminarian, both a pastor and seminary STM student, moved by the song *Siyahamba* (“We are Marching in the Light of God, ELW #866) was struck by the feeling that this song had long been about “someone else’s liberation.” I knew it as a song sung at “youth gatherings” or perhaps the obligatory expansion of a congregation’s “hymn repertoire at Epiphany or Transfiguration.” But it was the final hymn of a five-hour worship experience at Katutura, and the young people started to form lines of marching within the stadium, joined by hundreds and then thousands of older and old men and women. Within minutes, there was no one standing still in the stadium. Joel Neubauer “was taken by the reality that this song is not simply a hymn or a celebration of a neighbor’s new freedom: this was their heartfelt song of praise, a truth statement of the gospel and a breaking-in of the heaven.”⁸ ‘Liberated by grace’ took on more than a theme that day as hundreds of lines marched in every direction. It was a visible sign that the Lutheran community remains a movement, a dynamic, ongoing, global people on a journey, and less the image of one man taking his stand.

Resource: Video recordings of the 12th Assembly may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChoZ9YR6zjFpFW8jM9nw-4g/videos>.

Notes

- 1 LWF Press Conference, May 9, 2017, 6:15pm, <https://youtu.be/PzRUffa84mY>: (accessed 10/9/17)
- 2 LWF News, May 15, 2017.
- 3 Essay by Martin Kopp, LWF staff officer for Climate Justice Advocacy <https://2017.lutheranworld.org/content/creation-%e2%80%93-not-sale-131>: (accessed 10/10/17).
- 4 When the LWF Council voted for Namibia in 2013, it was a vote of confidence in the three churches of Namibia to be able to work together at a new and unprecedented level across familiar and traditional ecclesiastical boundaries. And yet the vote was also made with the confidence that Namibia, specifically Windhoek, could host a global gathering of this type and scope. Windhoek, the Southwest African anchor, was on display for the task of hosting, bearing the pressure to demonstrate in the words of one Namibian church leader, that Windhoek could host international events of a size and scale. High levels of security dominated the assembly, which included a member of the German parliament and on some occasions, the President of Namibia.

- 5 PUBLIC STATEMENT “On Reconciliation with respect to Genocide in Namibia” adopted May 15, 2017. (https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/en_-_ps_genocide_0.pdf) accessed 10/7/17.
- 6 Gender Justice implies the protection and promotion of the dignity of women and men who, being created in the image of God, are co-responsible stewards of creation. Gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations between women and men and the elimination of the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination. See more in the policy document: https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf (accessed 10/10/2017).
- 7 Sermon by Bishop Zephania Kameeta at Reformation Commemoration Service, May 14, 2017; <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-twelfth-assembly-sermons>: (accessed 10/11/17)
- 8 Joel Neubauer, Reflection Paper on LWF 12th Assembly, page 3.

John R. Spangler, United Lutheran Seminary’s Senior Vice President for Administration, attended the LWF Assembly, his second assembly as Secured Communication Staff. Spangler, a graduate of Yale Divinity School, is a Rostered Leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Building Global Relationships: Reflections on the LWF 12th Assembly

Joel Neubauer

Participating in the 12th Lutheran World Federation Assembly (LWF) as a visitor – observing as a pastor, a student and a believer – I had the very visceral feeling of being one minuscule letter within a word in a sentence of a very large book: I very much *belonged* with the assembly, but I was so very small within it.

The liturgies and Bible studies we shared (and the ordered procedures of business) were *mine* in the sense that these forms of worship, biblical texts and assembly rules have consistently punctuated my life. These were also *mine* in the sense that the assembly – like the church – does not exist apart from the human lives engaged in its ministry. Yet while these were *mine*, none of them needed *me*: the assembly – again like the church – did not need *me* “to live and move and have its being.”

Part of my experience at this assembly and of what has come to matter most (especially in terms of lasting impact) to me has been the pause to consider how and why I belong to a body – e.g. the assembly or the church *or Jesus* – while not being needed by its existence.

Answering *how* is as simple as turning again to the assembly’s theme: I belong to a body that doesn’t depend on me because I’ve been *liberated by God’s grace* to be a permanent guest in someone else’s home. Throughout the assembly I continually returned to an understanding that my tangible seat among those working delegates was an act of grace. Though no one needed me, they welcomed me. I was engaged, included, asked and answered as if I mattered – but had I been absent, everything would have progressed perfectly well. I received so much, but *why* was I there?

The assembly – the church – *can* live perfectly well without me. My experience was not necessary for the assembly’s work; the only thing I have to offer the church’s assembly is witness. What has mattered most to me has been the witness that I – and every individual beside me – was given to carry in and from that global gathering.

Re-Gathering

On a personal level the assembly witnessed an (unexpected) emotional charge. I first learned of Namibia as our synod’s companion church when I was growing up in the Metro Washington DC Synod: my congregation had been paired with a sister congregation in Onaanda, northern Namibia. As I shared very early in the assembly, my *childhood congregation in the Metro DC Synod was partnered with the Onaanda parish, shortly after Namibia’s independence in the early 1990’s. Our congregation’s relationship was built on shared prayers, visits, and support. More than two decades later, in Windhoek for the LWF Twelfth Assembly, I am meeting peers and friends who were also children of that relationship: God’s grace is still bringing us and regathering us together.*

That “re-gathering” was a consistent theme of my week in Windhoek. What began with a few conversations among assembly participants extended into much wider circles of unexpected friendship and shared memories. Assembly participants began to include conference center staff, restaurant servers, bus drivers and friends to piece together our shared memories and experiences. Between prayers and visits between our congregations (and I learned Onaanda is a particularly large parish), we had even shared pastoral exchanges in our Confirmation processes.

I thought someone might possibly recognize the name of a far away congregation that had been primary in shaping my faith and teaching me about the closeness of the church across the world, but I never imagined the church would assemble as actual sisters and brothers in Christ. In high theological terms: it knocked my socks off.

Holy Song that Liberates

At the same time my childhood congregation was building its relationship with the parish in Onaanda, South Africa was finally liberated from its government-sanctioned apartheid. As a part of the global celebration, my county’s youth chorus had been invited to the Kennedy Center for a PBS special that included *Siyahamba* – the first of many times I sang “We Are Marching in the Light of God” as it was soon included in *With One Voice*.

I had first learned to sing *Siyahamba* as a celebration of someone else’s liberation. I knew it as a song sung at youth gatherings or maybe as a hymn to expand a congregation’s culturally inclusive repertoire at Epiphany or Transfiguration. I had seen it listed among the hymns in our worship book for the assembly and noticed it would be a part of the global commemoration of the Reformation service in Katatura.

At the conclusion of our worship service on Sunday when we began to sing *Siyahamba* – as men and women, especially *older* men and women started to flood the stadium in dance – I was immediately and viscerally taken by the reality that this song has *not* simply

a hymn or a celebration of a neighbor's new freedom: this was their heartfelt song of praise, a truth statement of the gospel and a breaking-in of heaven. As a wheelchair was pushed in the procession and (who I imagine were) grandparents took children's hands, I was overcome with how important the phrase "*Liberated by God's Grace*" becomes when it is a matter of reality more than a theme at a conference.

When I saw the marching and singing hands were reaching for us to join, I maybe got a literal sense of what Luther called being *compelled* by the Spirit: I have never gone out dancing in worship and had the movement be genuine before. Again: socks knocked off.

Both the experiences of regathering with sisters and brothers from Onaanda and sharing in a new song of *Siyahamba* were devastatingly beautiful – mountaintop experiences – and gave me more to hold than I could handle. They were places where personal relationships and worship allowed me to witness how this church has shaped my life in ways that bring me together with others much more than anything holds us apart. With my eyes opened to how my childhood came into this assembly, I have also been impressed with the threads stemming out the assembly.

In the worship tent, when we were gathered for the evening Eucharist and invited to remove our shoes to stand on holy ground, I was sitting beside Robin Steinke. At Sisask's *Sanctus*, Dr Steinke leaned over and said, "This one is so beautiful." And the tent began to sing "Püha, püha, püha on Issand..." – and it *was* beautiful music, but more poignantly beautiful to sing words I trust in a language I don't speak within an assembly where so many people put our common worship of God over their own ability to speak the words. I was utterly humbled...and it knocked my socks off.

Since returning from the assembly, Sisask's *Sanctus* has become a bit of a repeating theme: both in local worship planning with my minister of music and then in worship at our Synod Assembly (with Rafael Malpica-Padilla as our speaker). On the one hand, it has been powerful to point out how our local worship connects and echoes the worship of Christians around the world – specifically allowing me to connect these moments of worship with the LWF gathered under the tent. On the other hand – and not in ways to which I'm immune – the most common response I heard to the *Sanctus* at our Synod Assembly was that it was too distracting to sing in Estonian. Granted, the context is so different when an assembly expects to sing in its native language, but I longed to give away the experience of all our singing in Windhoek where various languages rang out in tandem or else settled in on one set of words that would be unknown to many, but offered by – here, in a *sanctus* witnessed to by – all. This has been one of the most pointed times when I have seen the formative power of the global church to unite individuals in the common Word that expands beyond common words.

Above I've written about having my socks knocked off: that happened so much. I really don't have a good set of words to describe that feeling. Very personally, I found myself crying a lot. This was an embarrassingly weepy assembly for me. Meeting people and

gathering for worship and trying to sing and listening in our Bible studies: I felt an emotional exhaustion throughout the week that was joy-filled – *really joy-filled!* – but so joyful that it almost felt like sadness...and I'm off on a tangent here, but some of the emotions I have still been facing are a joyfulness that hurts to hold (and so I keep crying...I'm crying now...oy veh) and a really deep sense of guilt (for lack of better words) that this was all more than I should have hoped to touch. Biblically I keep falling into Ephesians 3:14-21 – and into the face I saw throughout the assembly of the God who is truly "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." I was very grateful for having a single room because I fell asleep a wreck each night.

The Gifts of Faith

As a pastor, what mattered most about the assembly was my charge from the congregation to carry them into – and my desire to extend back to them – this assembly. For my congregation, the ability to be their token of participation in the five-hundredth commemoration of 1517 was a very real and present responsibility.

As I shared with the group, it was important for my congregation that I wasn't in attendance as Joel but as Pastor – because their pastor's presence was their ability to share in this year and all it means. The congregation allowed me to be their arms extending an embrace to the world – and that honor and duty was immense (and I'm not sure I lived up to it). I wore my collar and St Mark clothing as a way to show them congregation (through photos) that I was not putting my call on hold to go be a Christian, but rather I was being a Christian as I live out my call to them. And I thought that would just about do it....

But I had a member – "*Kate*" – who wanted to send a gift. Kate knitted about one hundred seventy pocket-sized prayer squares (miniature prayer shawls) and asked me to take them and give them away with prayers: Kate was very clear that the prayers she offered were not in her name, but on behalf of the whole congregation. Kate is a woman who stumbled through our door with a friend on a New Year's resolution about two years ago: she's been angry at God plenty of times and had no clue what "a Lutheran" was, but she deeply knows grace and love.

I didn't know what to expect of the LWF assembly: my mental image was more like a global version of the national youth gathering than a global version of Synod Assembly. I thought it would be good to have a small gift to share from the congregation, but quickly realized that wasn't the norm for the LWF. But still, Kate had prayed and produced these gifts and I wasn't going to censure her generosity.

While we talked about creation and humans and salvation not being for sale, I was privileged to pass out Kate's love freely. I gave credit to the congregation, but it was Kate who wanted anyone and everyone to know that someone in Virginia was praying for sisters and brothers all over the world, most of whom she'd never meet. I gave her squares

to women and men, to bishops and children, to staff and volunteers: and nothing could prepare me for the words of thanks and love I would carry back to Kate. When folks said they'd treasure her gift, I knew they meant their words. And when children ran to get their friends until everyone had a prayer square, I was again painfully joy-filled to ask for a photo I could share with the woman who'd made them.

Kate only very quietly asked upon my return, "Did they like the squares?" I emailed her five photos: one of the children, one of a family, one of a seminarian, one of volunteer couple, one of the Rev. Ruth Filibus – all holding their squares. Kate replied:

I love them all! It really does bring joy to my heart knowing that something so small (to me) can bring joy to someone.

Thank you for sharing these photos with me.

I even made one for Betty so she could share in the generosity of the congregation.

Love and blessings to all of us!

Kate

When I realized Kate had knit one of the squares for Betty (a member with incurable, widespread cancer), it hit me that St. Mark has about one hundred seventy families. Kate had taken the directory and prayed for one family in our congregation through each square she crocheted, sending them in St Mark's name to our worldwide family. It wasn't important that Kate's pastor was wearing a clerical collar, but it was important to Kate that her pastor would take her love and share it freely. Her love – and St. Mark's love through her – was not for sale, but it was there.

Kate's gift of prayer squares was a tangible offering from St Mark to the global communion. There are also tangible gifts back to the congregation that have helped me bear witness to our place in the larger church: an Andean stole with the Assembly theme embroidered in Spanish "*Libres por la Gracia de Dios*" – connecting our congregation, our community partners in Ecuador, and a common thread in the LWF; an English language worship book from the (Happy) Danish church that will provide our Confirmation rite; East African linens for the Eucharist; music for us to sing; the basis for our adult evening VBS week, sharing the same conversations and Bible studies as used in the assembly; et cetera.

These are not merely "things" but signs of relationships that extend beyond the congregation in abstract terms (like our unity in Lord's Supper) and in concrete terms (like the realization that our congregation's commitment to one community in the Andes is matched by a worldwide church's love for God's people in all – even the remotest – places).

Faith's Education Movement

In no attempt at being trite, these relationships are what have resulted in my educational efforts in the congregation. In my role as a teacher, having been graced with the opportunity to listen to others speak in the assembly, I am valuing the opportunity to restrain my insights and point to the insights of others.

I am so educated and systemically empowered beyond others within my congregation and community that I am often asked to speak and offer my opinions. People are willing to listen to what I have to say. A gift of having neither voice nor vote at the LWF assembly was being in a place where no one was gathered *officially* for what I had to say. I wasn't at the microphone. I wasn't holding a voting machine. Even when I was stopped and showered with attention for being a male body in a clerical collar from the ELCA...it didn't take anyone long to realize I had no voice to speak for My Church. When I had nothing else to offer, I simply made a relationship and talk of business tended to move to talk of faith.

The faithful relationships I encountered and the voices I heard are the areas I most want to pass on in my ministry. Because I have the opportunity to point to stories told by other realities, I am pushing to open the conversations where I can reiterate the importance of the gospel from those whose voice *was* raised. When we gather for our adult evening VBS week, I want to be able to share a story from the assembly and then put the conversations among my community members: what will they say; how will they see grace; where is their liberation by God; who will they lift up if I am again quieter?

By focusing on the relationships and personal stories that developed during the assembly, I want to bear witness to all those who are bearing witness to this faith in our communion. I can point people online to the absolute value of keynotes and presentations, but the answer to "why I was there" needs to be shared in the stories and relationships.

Joel Neubauer is pastor of St Mark Lutheran Church in Yorktown, Virginia. His M.Div. (2007) is from Gettysburg Seminary. Neubauer attended the 2017 LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia with student visitors from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg as his final coursework in S.T.M. studies at United Lutheran Seminary (to be completed in Spring, 2018).

A Hermeneutic of Hope: A Christian Response to Climate Change

Scott Grier

I have always been fascinated by two things: God and science. As a very young man I became fascinated by nature and God's glorious creation that surrounded me. My fascination with God and science grew as I became older and I earned a bachelor's degree in geology with a focus on groundwater contamination. I have worked 25 years as an environmental consultant working to remediate contaminated soil and water. I am also an avid meteorologist.

In May, faculty and classmates of Gettysburg Seminary (now United Lutheran Seminary) had the opportunity to attend the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Twelfth Assembly held in Namibia, Africa. During the assembly there were various workshops offered and to my elation there was an Omatala ("marketplace" in Oshiwambo) workshop on climate change. I try to stay current on the latest meteorology trends and news, but I was hearing stories from Lutheran pastors of how climate change is affecting the people in their congregations – populations of less developed countries. I heard first-hand accounts from missionaries of how due to drought, villagers in Senegal must to walk 17 kilometers each day to obtain water. In Korea, coastal flooding and land loss due to rising sea levels threatens millions of people, and in 52 small island states climate change-induced sea-level rise is displacing communities and threatening their way of life. Even in North America, a bottled water company in Ontario, Canada controls a local spring and pumps millions of gallons of water per day causing depletion of the local wells due to drought and the massive water removal from the aquifer.

The task of the Christian is to understand the theological implications of the harm that climate change presents to all of creation in the context of affirming the triune God as creator and redeemer of the universe.¹

The scientific analyses of climate change and the role of human carbon emissions have been realized, documented, and are well-grounded. It is intellectually and morally irrespon-

sible to ignore, downplay, or fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations, food production, and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.²

Reading the Bible in the context of climate change gives a vision of hope: in God's faithfulness to creation; a call to practice love and justice to all of God's creation; and a warning of God's judgement to those who fail to do so. In this context, closing our ears to the voices of those most vulnerable to climate change would be nothing less than turning our back on those who Christ calls us to defend: the marginalized, suffering, poor of the world.³

Christians are biblically mandated to serve one another in love and therefore we must acknowledge how our actions affect others. Obedience to Christ in the context of climate change is a call to consider the negative impact our footprint has on the earth.⁴

The Biblical Account of Creation

According to a report of the Joint Working Group on Climate Change and Theology (JWGCCT), "The starting point for theological reflection on the issue of climate change is the great affirmation of Genesis 1.3, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."⁵ In this description of creation we see that God is the creator of the universe and of all life on earth and that creation is declared good by the creator. The JWGCCT also refers to the opening of the Gospel of John that identifies Christ as being the Word of God that was present while everything was created – nothing was created without Christ. Likewise, Christ is identified as the redeemer of all things created and reconciler of all things to God in his life, death and resurrection. Paul states this about Christ, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1.15-17).⁶

The Holy Spirit is the third part of God's triune nature involved in creation and in the reconciliation of all creation. Paul states in Romans 8.27, "And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."⁷

The Overwhelming Evidence

The human race is in a war – a war against nature, and it is not a fair fight. As a result, the threat from the skies is no longer missiles but ozone layer depletion and global warming. In the 1980's many scientists began to warn the public of the "looming environmental crisis" that was imminent.⁸ The ACT alliance co-founded by the Lutheran World

Federation released this statement, “Climate change continues to threaten lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable communities around the world. The communities we work with, especially in Africa and the Pacific, are already facing irreversible impacts of climate change.”⁹ The Mennonite Central Committee’s (MCC’s) Elizabeth Vincent reports that Bangladesh and other communities that have low elevations are ever-increasingly facing the burden of rising tides but do not have the economic resources to mitigate this loss of land. Vincent also reports that in the highlands of Bolivia, drastic weather patterns are jeopardizing the crops of small-scale farmers and crop failures have become common.¹⁰ These weather crises decrease the ability of farmers to provide for their families. In Canada, drought and the massive extraction of water by bottled water companies threaten aquifers of communities. In Peru, melting glaciers in the Andes Mountains threaten people in the valley of Huaraz,¹¹ and in the United States El Ninos caused by global warming are causing massive flooding and landslides in typically dry areas and persistent drought where there was formerly adequate rainfall. These severely changed weather patterns are threatening communities as a consequences of climate change. Since 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a network of more than 1,500 of the world’s leading climate experts from 80 countries, published yearly reports on the best available evidence concerning past climate change, the greenhouse effect, and recent changes in global temperatures. Based on the panels reports and other studies there is documented, clear evidence that the measured atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases including CO₂, CFCs, methane, and nitrous oxide, have risen substantially in the past few decades. Most of the increased levels of these greenhouse gases have been caused by human activity.¹²

Theological and Scientific Integration

It is important to reflect upon our theological response to climate change by considering the implications of God’s word and the overwhelming scientific evidence. In the Biblical narrative the comprehensive theme is, “God creating the universe, God in Christ bringing reconciliation to a world gone astray (Gen. 3, 4, 6), and God’s promised redemption of all things in Christ and through the Spirit.”¹³ According to David Atkinson in “Climate Change and the Gospel,” he asserts “What matters is how we see ourselves in God’s world, how we humans relate to the rest of God’s creation. It is about what makes for human flourishing and the well-being of all God’s creation, on which our life depends. This is about morality, and spirituality.”¹⁴

There needs to be consideration given to a number of environmental factors that reinforce our God-given welfare. When a less developed country’s (LDC) ecosystem is degraded or it’s land is lost due to rising sea level, that country’s social fabric deteriorates, and the inhabitants’ very existence is threatened. According to the MCC, “The communities most impacted by climate change are those with the least resources to alleviate

the damage and adapt to permanent changes, such as rising sea levels.”¹⁵ According to the IPCC, all of these changes will have significant impacts upon all human populations. Moreover, according to the Stern Report, “the poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to cause the problem.”¹⁶ Environmental expert Liliana Camacho agrees, “Climate change looms as a huge factor in poverty alleviation. It hits the poorest people the hardest. The World Bank estimates it will push 100 million additional people into poverty by 2030.”¹⁷ Vincent of MCC states, ultimately, as faith communities we must consider the negative effects that climate change has on others and then draw from our ethical and moral values to address our “dependence on fossil fuels and the hidden price tag of emissions and global warming.”¹⁸

“Considering that many attempts within our political system to address climate change are faced with gridlock, we cannot underestimate the importance of faith communities – and interfaith collaboration – to put pressure on politicians to address climate change.”¹⁹ Blew Kind, in *Environmental Justice*, states “Environmental justice also involves a war between human profit and desire and the health of the earth. It has to do with a lifestyle change and is an overall lens for how to discern society...Our life and future depend on people taking environmental justice seriously”²⁰

Our Hope and Help

As Christians, our hope is built on the rich and wonderful promises of God’s love and mercy exhibited at the cross of Christ. Our hope leads us not to fear nor despair, for we place our trust in God. The Biblical narrative from beginning to end depicts God’s rescue of his people. Consider the following biblical portrayals: the Jewish nation’s exodus from bondage in Egypt, the defeat of the Assyrians, the Israelite’s return from exile in Babylon, the promise of a righteous ruler from the line of David—Christ the Messiah, the reinstatement of God’s law through the “Jesus filter,” God’s righteous judgement over evil, God’s reign on earth, the resurrection of the dead, and a new heaven and a new earth. In, “*So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth,*” former LWF staff member Karen L. Bloomquist writes about poverty and the mission of the Church in Africa, “Our hope that sustains and empowers us in the long-term...is the promised fulfillment of the reign of the triune God which we confess, are transformed by and in light of which Africa and the rest of the world can live.”²¹

While God promises help in times of trouble, people of faith must take the initiative and the lead in responding to the challenges posed by climate change by considering their lifestyle and how it contributes to the problem. The first task of church leadership is to encourage and enable parishioners to examine their lifestyle in light of climate change. If we choose to ignore the scientific evidence and not lessen our footprint of greenhouse gas emissions, we fail to take seriously Christ’s command to “love thy neighbor” and are at risk of God’s righteous judgement.

Our Response: Both individual and Broadly Ecumenical

The ACT Alliance is a coalition of 145 churches and church-related organizations working together in over 100 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people. ACT Alliance is supported by the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, two among other religious agencies. According to the LWF website, “The alliance provides the ecumenical movement with structures to mobilize rapidly in response to disasters – and to improve collaboration on development and advocacy issues.”²²

The call to respond to the issue of climate change requires each individual to make a considerable personal change, to an increasingly sustainable lifestyle. The journey will have few immediate payoffs, will probably mean significant changes for each person, and will likely be uncomfortable. In “Hope in God’s Future,” the conclusion of the report compares the journey of reducing our footprint on the earth to the journey of the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt to the promised land – a land flowing with milk and honey. The report concludes:

“Such a journey changed the children of Israel from a disorganized group of refugees into a nation...The Israelites’ guide was a God who loved justice and hated oppression, who cared for the humble and opposed exploitation: we believe in the same God who loves those who are exploited and oppressed today. We too set out on a journey of freedom in response to the challenge of climate change, blessed by God’s peace, sent by our saviour and going our way in the company of the Holy Spirit (John 20.21–22).”²³

Our first step in the journey of climate change restitution is repentance. We must admit that we have failed in our responsibility and that creation is rapidly being destroyed. Then, we must turn from our complacency and seriously assess our own practices and contribution to climate change and to environmental damages, and promote among our churches, strong advocacy, leadership, and actions in favor of ecological and economic justice for all of God’s creation.

Everyone Counts

Each person makes a difference, whether you are the CEO of a large international organization or simply a person that is concerned with the environmental condition of the world. We can all learn to live with the intention to lessen our carbon footprint on the earth. Brainstorming ways that I could make a difference as a result of my research, I decided to initiate a recycling program at a soccer complex that is adjacent to my property. During the first tournament 368 pounds of plastic bottles were collected and sent to a recycling plant. That is 368 pounds of plastic that did not end up in landfills, streams, and oceans. Each of us can make a difference by living intentionally; cutting down on the amount of energy we use; making wise travel choices; buying sustainably produced products; and recycling.

Congregational Creation Care

One great example of a congregation making a difference is the Taftsville Chapel Mennonite Fellowship (TCMF) located in Taftsville, Vermont. The Taftsville assembly recently decided to reflect upon their core values while developing new purpose and vision statements. They state that, “When envisioning ways to live into our purpose and vision, ideas coalescing around creation care energized us.”²⁴ They elected a representative to the network known as Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) where the network’s purpose is “concerned with caring for and restoring God’s creation.”²⁵ MCCN network members evaluated nine aspects of Taftsville’s church life in respect to their newly identified core values – rating stewardship and setting goals for each of the nine areas and from MCCN’s report. TCMF subsequently developed a comprehensive plan for reducing the ecological and carbon footprint of each area. They will revisit their plan during September of this year when many Christian congregations celebrate the season of creation. Taftsville reports, “Most of our initiatives don’t cost much (and some even save cost, like homemade cleaning supplies). They have designated offerings in a reserve and they are going to invest in a solar project with a \$10,000 grant provided by MCCN.

Heather Wolfe sums it up by saying, “We see intentional creation care as much more than a social movement. Rather, it is rooted in faith and aligned with our values. Caring for and restoring God’s good creation is a way to love God and our neighbors.”²⁶

Notes

- 1 Hope in God’s Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change (London: Methodist Publishing, 2012), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1085486/higf-report-and-study-guide-0514.pdf> (accessed June 17, 2017).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Harold W. Attridge, ed., *The Harper Collins Study Bible Fully Revised and Updated New Revised Standard Version including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books With Concordance* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 2000.
- 7 Attridge, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1921.
- 8 Debra A. Miller, ed., *Global Warming* (Farmington Hills: Current Controversies Series, 2013), 18.
- 9 ACT Alliance, *28th Session of the UN Human Rights Council Human Rights and Climate Change*, 06 March 2015, 1, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWF-ACT-Oral_Statement_HRC28_Human_Rights_and_Climate_Change.pdf (accessed June 17, 2017).
- 10 *Stern Review Report on The Economics of Climate Change*, (London: Cabinet Office - H. M. Treasury, 2005), URL: < http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm>, xxvi. (accessed June 17, 2017).
- 11 Nick Miroff, “Melting Glaciers Leave Peru Vulnerable,” *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2017, front page & A14.

- 12 Daniel Bedford and John Cook, *Climate Change: Examining the Facts* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO LLC, 2016), 54.
- 13 “Hope in God’s Future,” Joint working group, 15.
- 14 Atkinson, David, “*Climate Change and the Gospel: Why we in the churches need to treat climate change more urgently*,” Sermon-Epiphany 2015, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Climate-and-Gospel-David-Atkinson-30-01-2015.pdf>.
- 15 Elizabeth Vincent, “Climate change and faith: a Christian Imperative,” Mennonite Central Committee, April 29, 2016, <https://mcc.org/stories/climate-change-faith-christian-imperative> (accessed June 17, 2017).
- 16 Stern Report, *The Economics of Climate Change*, xxvi.
- 17 Liliana Camacho, “The Uneasy Urgency of Climate Change,” *The Mennonite* (April 2017): 23.
- 18 Vincent, *Climate change and faith*, 1.
- 19 Stern Report, *The Economics of Climate Change*, xxvi.
- 20 Kind, Blew. “Environmental Justice,” *The Mennonite* (April 2017): 27.
- 21 Karen L. Bloomquist and Musa Panti Filibus, *So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth: Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa* (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2007), 77.
- 22 “The Lutheran World Federation,” ACT Alliance, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/act-alliance> last modified unknown, (accessed August 9, 2017).
- 23 “Hope in God’s Future,” Joint working group, 19.
- 24 Heather Wolfe, “Our Journey Into Creation Care,” *The Mennonite* (April 2017): 18.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 21.

Scott Grier is a seminarian at United Lutheran Seminary. He was a member of the class attending the Lutheran World Federation 12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia. This paper is a response to a climate change workshop offered at the assembly. He is a graduate (Geology) of Kutztown University and lives in Hagerstown, Maryland. Scott is an active member of the Mt. Zion Mennonite Church in Boonsboro, Maryland.

The Reformation Will be Local

Samuel F. Chamelin

My decision to attend a Lutheran seminary as a UCC pastor and student was shaped by one simple thing – I valued Lutheran sacramental theology. I had spent my childhood conversing with a Jesus who only identified as a divine judge, and my faith changed dramatically when I discovered Jesus – fully God and fully human. This more robust picture of Jesus had sent me to the sacraments, both as everyday objects – bread, wine, and water – and as a means of grace. I discovered an incarnate Jesus, one who identified with me in every way – body, soul, and spirit. That was the Jesus I was committed to following. I wanted to live a genuinely sacramental life, and to lead a church that shared an authentic experience of the Kingdom of God. As I stepped into the mission field of rural pastoral ministry I discovered that my childhood experience wasn’t entirely different from my new ecclesial ecosystem. Churches were comfortable with “God the divine,” but struggled to define the daily life of communal discipleship. What was “church” other than a prelude for football?

This was exacerbated by the very tangible decline of our local communities. The local paper carried an article about an old feed mill operator who bemoaned, “People just don’t know each other the way they used to.” While this might read as the curmudgeonly ruminations of an old man, the juvenile language of “Facebook official” relationships suggests that the nature of community has indeed changed, shaped as it is by iPhones, “bedroom communities,” and Amazon, et al. Furthermore, a significant part of our population was suffering from food insecurity despite being surrounded by acres corn and soybeans. Most daunting of all, climate change – acknowledged or not – looms as an existential crisis. All of these issues touched the “human” part of our faith, yet the church sat and prayed, “Thy Kingdom come” while secretly hoping to be transported to the Kingdom. So even while I presided over a sacramental congregation, we were practically fundamentalists, placing all our hope in a way-beyond-the-blue deity.

I found myself believing, however, that this “human” part of faith has been practiced in the past (albeit imperfectly), and could be practiced in the future. Community, food,

and land stewardship were always fundamentally linked in the rural church. It seemed as if there was a dusty model that could be pointed towards the future to re-root faith in a place. In response to the collision of these three points – communal spiritual formation, sustainable agriculture, and environmental stewardship – a group of people founded a church plan – The Keep & Till. The mission of The Keep & Till is to make agrarian disciples of Jesus Christ to serve rural communities. By participating in sustainable agriculture, we are reconnected to creation, and to the Savior who walked creation with us and who comes to us in bread and wine. In this way, we are formed as disciples who are ready to serve the places where we live. We want rural places to be a place where the gospel is embodied in people and the land. In doing so, we envision rural renewal through sustainable agriculture and environmental responsibility informed by radical Christian faith.

“Agrarian” Faith

We are often asked how the word “agrarian” contributes to a soil-based faith. Our use of the word takes its cue from Wendell Berry. In his brief essay entitled “The Agrarian Standard,” Berry contrasts “agrarian” with “industrial.” Industrial thinking, he says, sees everything as a machine to be used for production at any cost. “The way of industrialism is the way of the machine. To the industrial mind, a machine...is an explanation of the world and of life. Because industrialism cannot understand living things except as machines, and can grant them no value that is not utilitarian...it cannot use the land without abusing it.”¹ It is a mindset of manipulation, that things have value only as they serve my production ends. Agrarian,” Berry says, starts with givens – air, water, geography, flora and fauna. “Agrarian farmers know that their very identity depends on their willingness to receive gratefully, use responsibly, and hand down intact an inheritance, both natural and cultural, from the past.”² An agrarian mindset recognizes the essential contribution of place to our humanity, and seeks to build a life in consideration of the moral integrity and collective wisdom of that place.

In this way, industrialism is an anthropological problem. If industrialism constantly separates things into constituent parts, and posits value only as it serves the ends of production, then agrarianism makes vastly different claims on humanity and the world, considering the value of all parts of an ecosystem, and organizing life in such a way that humanity and the environment are able to thrive, a picture of the very Kingdom of God.

An Ecological Anthropology

Berry quips elsewhere in the same essay, “The shortest way to understand this, I suppose, is the religious way.”³ Genesis 2 offers us a narrative to craft anthropological framework inside of the created order. Here, God puts hands to soil, crafts a human being, and “then

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”⁴ Humanity is a divine collision of body and spirit, soil and soul. Immediately after humanity is created the author tells us, “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.”⁵ This spirit/soil human being is placed inside an ecosystem - a garden. Gardens and agriculture become the natural intersection of the environment and human need. The best gardens are places of perpetual productivity, provided they are well kept.

Genesis leaves no doubt - we are the product of our ecosystem. Our very bodies are created from the very elements of the ecosystem. To say that we are “connected” to our ecosystems is insufficient; we are our ecosystem. Furthermore, we are designed to live in ecosystems. There is no time when humanity existed outside of a geographical place. We are not set over and above our ecosystems, but into the midst of them. There is no anthropology without ecology.

Dis-Placement

Therefore, if we remove ecology, we do profound damage to the *imago Dei*. Displacement dehumanizes us, for we cannot be human without a place. We remain soil-based creatures, but it is as disconnected and unintelligible as a bottle of water or a bag of topsoil – removed from one place to be used wherever, thrust into the machinery of colonialism and industrialism.

Consider the plight of the Israelites in Egypt. Famine drives the Hebrews off their land towards Egypt, where they are promptly enslaved. Displaced as they are, they become an instrument of productivity for the economic well-being of another. It is no accident, then, that God sends a shepherd to free the people and bring them to a land where they can experience God as their most fully human selves. When Moses arrives, he argues with Pharaoh that God desires them to go into the wilderness to worship. God will not be worshipped “anywhere,” but in a specific locale. That worship is not to be limited to men (the practice of the time) or to just humans, but to the entirety of the community, thus Moses’ insistence that livestock be included in the emancipation. The entire community-in-ecosystem is the only appropriate arrangement for the worship of YHWH.

This theme applies to the exile as well. Improper consideration of the land leads to improper treatment of one another, which ultimately causes God to eject the people of Israel from the land. Betrayal of the land in the name of productivity is betrayal of the covenant.

In our own national narrative, slavery is an essential part of our story, one that rears its ugly head repeatedly. Willie Jennings explores this theme with devastating precision, “The earth itself was barred from being a constant signifier of identity. Europeans defined Africans and all other apart from the earth even as they separated them from the land...

The profound commodification of bodies that was New World slavery signifies an effect humankind has yet to reckon with fully – a distorted view of creation.⁶ By attempting to define humans by their productive capacity, apart from the earth, we have commodified one another and the earth.

Lest we think that the lessons of commodification belong to our past, industrialism created the notion of “human resources,” turning spirit-and-soil human beings into cogs of an assembly line machine, standing on the concrete and steel of “economic progress” instead of the good earth of “home.” Technology completed this identity stripping by reducing us to an avatar.

These ideas – slavery, environmental degradation, industrialism – all find their roots in a displaced, commodified humanity. It should shock no one, then, that the solution is found in incarnated liberation. The Incarnation is a total reunification of the human. When the Spirit overshadows Mary, and this virgin is now with child, we have the ex nihilo reconstitution of the world. Spirit is reunited with soil, and this particular human is placed in a place. As the gospels unfold, we see a re-ecologizing of humanity, bringing people back into relationship with their place and with their communities. Jesus bears witness to a productive, but not destructive, way of being in the world. Most importantly, in the cross we find that death gives way to life, a most ecological idea, now used to reinvigorate all of creation with the resurrected life of God. From an agrarian perspective, the call of the Church is to re-imagine salvation as the flourishing of humanity and environment by rooting people in the soil of a place for the development of authentic community. What are the givens of this place, and how do we organize a faithful life that properly honors and critiques the place where we live?

Out With the Industrial, In With the Agrarian

At The Keep & Till, it is our conviction that the rural church is uniquely (but not exclusively) positioned to re-imagine a world where we fulfill our anthropological destiny. As a rural church, we want to engage our land and our local culture as a given to help us catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God in this particular place, to incarnate the Kingdom in this soil, a Kingdom where all are fed and where the environment thrives. Yet we acknowledge that all of us are infected by an industrial spirituality. We grew up in it, we were educated in it, we conduct most of our daily business according to its dictates. Indeed, even our churches are infected by it. So we realized we needed to root out some of these tendencies and begin the process of discovering a biblical counter-narrative.

We decided to begin with prayer. Pastor Brian Zahnd put it best, “Prayer is not to get God to do what we think God ought to do. Prayer is about being properly formed.”⁷ Our conviction is that a steady diet of regular, disciplined prayer teaches us the ways of God and forms our minds in the narrative of God. Like a child tracing the letters of the alpha-

bet in order to write, we trace the text of the scriptures in order to discern God’s voice. This is why we created Agrarian Daily Prayer (ADP). It is a tool for prayer designed to bring us face to face with a narrative that rejects colonial “one size fits all,” and teaches us to hear the voice of the Creator, training us to expand our vision for a Kingdom of thriving for all.

Not only does ADP teach us to pray and develop an agrarian hermeneutic, but we have found that praying together, even when apart, does a remarkable job of creating community. As we pray, we discover that we share a perspective, a language, and a vision that has made this work infinitely easier and more enjoyable. More enjoyable, because every conversation is filled with a diversity of opinions that have opened our minds to the different ways that God is speaking. Easier, because our compasses are all pointing at a true north. It has been remarkable that we have bounced right past all the typical church disagreements – contemporary vs. traditional, hymns vs. “praise songs,” old people vs. young people – towards an agrarian vision that most of us can’t fully make out, but undeniably know exists.

An Ecclesiology of An Expanding Vision

As a child, my own religious tradition was introduced to Rick Warren’s *A Purpose Driven Church* (the antecedent to *Purpose Driven Life*). In this proposal, Warren outlines discipleship as a journey from station to station, until we finally bring others to Christ, who begin the process all over again. This model suffers from over-industrialization, treating discipleship as an assembly line, with faith as its product.

For the agrarian, the prevailing goal isn’t so much to produce as it is to become aware. If agrarians must take note of “givens,” then being increasingly aware and sensitive to the *sitz im leben* is essential. Spirituality is about expanding vision. So we constructed a schema to help us understand our own process. We rejected the straight line, and embraced concentric circles.

Our inner-most circle is the Eucharist, where we find two agricultural products setting on an open table, communicating to us the body and blood of Christ. Indeed, nothing eclipses the centrality of the cross made present to us in the Eucharist. Because we celebrate this meal at a table, we are called to “discern the body.”⁸ So our next circle is prayer. Here, we engage in activities that do the work of spiritual formation in the context of a community, whether it is the worshipping community, small groups, or interpersonal relationships. We emphasize that while our faith is personal, it is rarely private, and that by sharing our life together with others, we grow. As we pray, it is expected that we become aware that we are part of a larger reality, the community in which we find ourselves part. Community is our next circle. Here, we become aware and pay attention to the larger realities of our community’s strengths, weaknesses, and needs, and we devote ourselves as a church to hearing those needs. No community is a community unto itself, as it only people made up

a community. So we discern our final circle, the ecosystem. What are the larger biological, geological, hydrological, meteorological realities that we participate in everyday? And do we see ways that God's goodness is enacted there? As we stand on the ecological level and look back towards all these circles, we realize the interconnected of all the things that bring meaning to us, and we remember that Christ, present in the Eucharist, is at the center of it all.

Agricultural Expression

Finally, it is important to us that we reject a practically gnostic faith. Too often, churches will stand on the sidelines, screaming passionately with our words towards a preferred future, and slumping apathetically with our bodies towards enacting that reality. It is simply not enough for an agrarian Church to sit inside on concrete and bemoan our disconnect with our places. Without an agricultural expression, this particular kind of church risks being reduced to a perpetual Harvest Home celebration. Therefore, we are committed to an agricultural expression, where we raise food and care for our local environment as an expression of our faith.

Our goals are twofold. First, we want to participate in the new future we see. To that end, we raise food to stem the tide of over-industrialized food in our industry. First, we hope to get fresh produce to the food insecure, providing healthier options for our local community. We've been able to partner with two wonderful local churches that are feeding the housing and food insecure, and we're proud to participate with them. Furthermore, our hope is to support a local economy and invest in the "Go Local" movement. To that end, we hope to grow wintertime vegetables to sell to local restaurants to support their efforts, and to create a second income stream for the church to make us more organizationally sustainable.

Second, we want to ask good questions. So we want to be a laboratory of learning and exploration. We want to step into the questions of agriculture and ecology. Can we participate in figuring out how to feed the world while preserving our topsoil? Can we educate people to grow their own food and care for their land in more responsible and long-lasting ways? Can we be a place where we educate the next round of students, scientists, social workers, and theologians in this kind of ministry? In this way, we hope to be a place where people can come to grow.

The Reformation Will Be Local

As the Church Universal recalls the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it would do well to remember that yet another reformation may be imminent. Our days of petroleum-induced surface dwelling and fundamentalist-induced gnosticism are drawing to a close.

Yet there remains hope, for the Church carries a robust anthropology for human and environmental thriving. To see it come to fruition, the Church will need to repent of the ways in which we have tried to exceed our soil-based boundaries, to be like God. Yet in repentance, we will discover that we are not yet too far gone from who we are created to be, a fully ecologized human being in community with one another. Prayerfully, we will be able to re-imagine a Church that seeks the salvation and well-being of all things, from the smallest microbe to God's appointed human stewards. In this way, salvation will "come to this house." Salvation is not a reality that sits above us in a far-away land. It does not exist in the next church or the next community. Salvation comes *here*, the Kingdom breaks in *here*. That is a faith worthy of our God, fully divine and fully human, who incarnates a new way for all of creation.

Notes

- 1 Wendell Berry, "The Agrarian Standard," *Orion*. (2002). <https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-agrarian-standard/>.
- 2 Berry, *ibid*.
- 3 Berry *ibid*.
- 4 Genesis 2:7 NRSV.
- 5 Genesis 2:8 NRSV.
- 6 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination – Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 43.
- 7 Brian Zahnd, "An Encyclical and a Massacre," <https://brianzahnd.com/2015/06/an-encyclical-and-a-massacre/>.
- 8 1 Corinthians 11:29 NRSV.

Samuel F. Chamelin is a pastor of the United Church of Christ, and a 2014 graduate of Gettysburg Seminary. He is the founder of The Keep & Till in Carroll County, Maryland, and serves as the Sustainability Coordinator for United Lutheran Seminary.

Sermon on Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28

August 20, 2017

Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen. I hardly know where to begin this morning. If I had a good joke to share, I'd use it...but frankly, my heart is too heavy to begin that way.

We have just been through a week from hell.

- White supremacists and neo-Nazis spewing slogans of resentment, hatred and bigotry.
- Heather Heyer and a host of others killed or injured in a violent vehicular terrorist attack in Charlottesville, Virginia.
- Politicians ducking for cover, fearful of antagonizing their base.
- Rancorous public debates over the purpose and future of Civil War statues.
- Moral confusion and staff shake-ups in the White House.

Overwhelmed by these and other events of the past week, our SW MN Synod Bishop Jon Anderson has wearily confessed that he is “soul sick”... literally sick to his stomach from what he has seen and heard of our nation’s on-going history of racism and discrimination.

Bishop Anderson acknowledged that we of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are a mostly white church and that the sin of failing to address racism falls squarely on us.

In a sermon from last Sunday, Pastor Yolanda Denson Byers, who is a hospice chaplain in the St. Cloud area, spoke these words to the people of Resurrection Lutheran Church in St. Joseph, Minnesota.²

“If we, in church, don’t have the moral courage to stand up at a time like this, our faith won’t mean much. I saw on Facebook, someone asked, if you ever wonder what you would

do during the Holocaust, during the Civil War, during moments like these – you now know. You would do whatever you’re doing right now.

“If you ever wondered how you would stand up and be counted in a moment when destiny has seized us, whatever you do in this moment right here, is what you would do. And so in churches all over America, we have to say something that’s true.

“And what is true?” she asked.

“Jesus loves us, this we know...for the Bible tells us so. Red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in God’s sight.”

“And when we fail to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength, when we fail to love all of our neighbors as ourselves – it is SIN, my friends. Racism is sin. White supremacy is sin.”

Pastor Byers then said that it would have been far better if the real pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church, a white man, rather than herself a black woman, had been there to preach this sermon.

“We (black and brown people) have been sayin’ it! We need YOU to say it. We need our white brothers and sisters in Christ to SAY IT!”

Senior Pastor David Lose of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis echoes that same sentiment: “...simply knowing that God loves all people is not enough,...we also need to proclaim the Gospel clearly and compellingly...Knowing what is right without *speaking* it in some way is not enough!”³

That’s where this morning’s Gospel story from Matthew comes into play. The Canaanite woman, though facing seeming rejection and humiliation at the hands of Jesus and his disciples, will not be silenced. She had heard the good news of God’s love for all people as evidenced in the stories about Jesus and his ministry, and that had created such a faith within her that she refused to be put off by Jesus’ declaration that he’d come to save the house of Israel: “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table. Have mercy on me and my daughter, Jesus.”

“Oh, woman,” Jesus responded, “your faith is something else...it’s terrific. What you desire, you will receive.” And at that very moment, the woman’s daughter was made well.

The Canaanite woman, as Lose puts it, “...did not retreat to silence but spoke out, offering a testimony that rings down through the ages: ‘See me! See me as a person, not as a woman or a Canaanite or a minority or a foreigner or someone from a different religion or as a burden. See me as a person and as a child of God.’”⁴

Toward the end of her sermon to the folks in St. Joseph, Pastor Byers issued this challenge: “...(we of) the ELCA (are) going to have to decide whose side we’re on. We’re either on God’s side – the side of love, the side of justice, the side of righteousness, the side of mercy, the side of kindness, the side of goodness, the side of faithfulness – or we’re on the side of the folks with tiki torches? Mowing down men and women and boys and girls in the streets.”

And then, she said: “If we keep Jesus to ourselves – shame on us! And if we don’t tell everybody that God loves them, then shame on us! And if we don’t confront racism wherever we find it, even if it’s at our own kitchen tables, then we’re complicit in this sin!”

“You have heard the call to action. You don’t have to go somewhere far away. You don’t have to get on a plane and go save somebody in Africa. Stay at home, at your own table, and change your little piece of the world for Jesus.”

Well, as I said at the beginning of my sermon, it’s been a hell of a week...but there’s heaven ahead where God’s word of grace and love for all people is proclaimed to ears that desperately need to hear.

Be of good courage, and peace be with you, my friends. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Notes

- 1 Alan Bray’s sermon was preached on Sunday, August 20, 2017, at First Lutheran Church (ELCA) in St. Peter, Minnesota.
- 2 Yolanda Denson Byers’ sermon was preached on Sunday, August 13, 2017, at Resurrection Lutheran Church (ELCA) (<http://rlcstjoe.com/>) and may be referenced at <http://wetalkwelisten.wordpress.com/2017/08/14/what-are-you-doing-here-rev-dr-yoland-denson-byers>.
- 3 David Lose, “Pentecost 11A: The Canaanite Woman’s Lesson,” *In the Meantime*, www.davidlose.net/2017/08/pentecost-11-a-the-canaanite-womans-lesson.
- 4 Ibid.

Alan Bray, a native South Dakotan with Swedish roots, is a 1971 graduate of Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. His M.Div. is from Luther/Northwestern Theological Seminary. Recently retired, Bray was an English teacher for seven years before becoming a pastor; over the course of 33 years, he served several congregations in Minnesota and in West Berlin, Germany. Bray lives in St. Peter, Minnesota, with his wife Gretchen and their daughter Julia. This sermon was preached at First Lutheran Church in St. Peter.

Flag and Cross: A Challenge to the Church The 2017 Urban Theological Institute Lecture

J. Wendell Mapson, Jr.

On the route between home and church I pass by a small house of worship that sits on a hill on the side of the road. And in front of that church there is a cross planted on the church’s neatly manicured lawn. Nothing unusual about a cross on church grounds. In fact, it would be unusual not to see a cross somewhere either outside the church building or inside. Crosses and churches go together. Show me a church without the image of the cross somewhere on the church grounds: plastered on the walls, embroidered on choir robes, engraved in church pews, etched on communion trays and on pulpit furniture. Crosses hang from lofty sanctuary ceilings. Crosses are designed in beautiful stained-glass windows. Crosses speak to us from their lofty perch on top of church steeples that reach high into the heavens. Not unusual to see a cross somewhere on holy ground. No more unusual than seeing the golden arches in front of McDonalds, the Nike swoosh on a warm up jacket, an apple on the lid of an Apple computer or the NBC peacock on the NBC channel. For the cross is a reminder of just how much God loves us and how our salvation was purchased on a tree. Nothing unusual about seeing a cross on church grounds.

However, what was unusual about the cross on the lawn of this church was that it was draped in a large American flag. In fact, there was more of the flag showing than the cross. At other times this same cross had either stood alone on the lawn or was draped in purple during the Lenten season or in white during Easter, but never before had I seen this cross clothed in an American flag. I never parked the car and knocked on the church door to ask why. I don’t know if there was some message intended or whether or not the church leaders were making a statement about the flag or the cross or both. I didn’t investigate to find out the church’s political or patriotic leanings or whether someone from the church’s decorating club thought it was pretty. I know very little about the congregation’s denominational beliefs and outlook. But I did see a cross on a lawn in front of a church, draped in an American flag. And for the time given to me this morning I want to lift this up as a sad

and troubling commentary on religion in America today – a metaphor of the challenges facing the contemporary church of Jesus Christ.

First, may I point out that statistically, among most highly industrialized nations of the world, America is considered a highly religious nation, that is, when it comes to church membership and church attendance, as well as to the number of people who claim religious affiliation, even if they don't attend church regularly. After all, we do stamp our coins, "In God we Trust." We include in our Pledge of Allegiance the words, "...one nation under God..." We do sing with great gusto during the seventh inning stretch and half-time festivities at football games, "God Bless America." In our schools today, as well as the schools of my childhood, we sing, "America, America, God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood..." From these indications it seems undeniable that America loves God.

In contrast, many of the European nations have seen significant and rapid decline in church membership and church attendance over the past several decades. Many of the great churches and cathedrals of Europe are now gothic museums, empty relics of a by-gone era. Long gone are the days when Charles Haddon Spurgeon, George Whitfield, Joseph Parker, G. Campbell Morgan, Alexander Maclaren and others attracted thousands to hear the Gospel preached in sanctuaries with neither sound systems nor air-conditioning. On Sundays Spurgeon preached in the sanctuary of London's massive Metropolitan Tabernacle with a seating capacity of 5,000 with standing room for another 1,000, and he preached several times a week. Here in Philadelphia in the early part of the 20th century a sanctuary on south Broad Street accommodated the thousands who came to hear a preacher who was once janitor of the church where he later became pastor. His name? Charles Albert Tindley.

Compared to European nations, the American church at least appears stronger. Yet, the reality is that church attendance in America is in significant decline. Fewer and fewer Americans claim denominational affiliation as main-line denominations and seminaries experience a steady falling away from the faith once delivered to the saints. And we now live in an age when MacDonald's golden arches are a more recognizable symbol than the cross. A couple of weeks ago there was an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about the emergence of so-called "house churches," small, intimate gatherings with no defined liturgy, no stained-glass windows, no hymns giving voice to what they believe, no tradition to keep them grounded, no buildings, no history, no sermons – just discussions. Even the archdiocese of Philadelphia reported that in 2016 only 20 percent of Roman Catholics attended mass each Sunday, a decline from the previous year. Yet, in spite of the decline of Christianity in America, America and Americans claim to be a highly religious nation.

The problem is in defining what we mean by religious. What we mean when we talk about the Christian faith in the present culture and the blending of faith and culture. What people mean when they claim belief in God and which god or whose god are they talking about. Appealing to a "higher power" may make one spiritual but not necessarily Christian. We can no longer assume that when someone uses the name God he or she is

talking about our God, the God who confronts us on the pages of the Holy Bible with a radical call to obedience. The God who said, "Let there be..." and worlds came into being. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Most of all the God of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, the Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

What ought to be disturbing to us is that, not atheists, but American Christians helped to put in office the current president of the United States of America. It is thought that up to 80 percent of white and some black evangelical Christians voted to elect a man president of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth and leader of the free world, in spite of his highly questionable business dealings, his demeaning and objectifying comments about women, his mean-spirited views on immigrants and Mexicans, his strategy of divisiveness, pitting people against one another for political gain, his appeal to fear, his demonizing of those who have different views. Christians who want America to dominate the world by military might rather than by diplomacy and moral persuasion. Christians who sing with great gusto, "God Bless America," but the America they want God to bless excludes all who do not look like them. Notice, the mantra, the rallying cry of many of these Christians is not God first, but America first. They assume, falsely, that God and America are one and the same; that what's good for America must be good for God, since God is an American.

Also what is yet disturbing about our history is that many Christians were once slave owners and many Christian preachers preached slavery from their pulpits, as if slavery were sanctioned by God and selected portions of Scripture to baptize their bigotry. Many who belonged to the abolitionist movement, though they believed that slavery was immoral, did not necessarily believe that blacks were equal to whites; just that it was immoral to enslave them. Remember as well that Dr. Martin Luther King's April 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, written on scraps of newspaper and smuggled out by his attorney, was not written to the politicians of Montgomery, Alabama, not even to non-believers, but addressed to eight white Christian church leaders who had chastised him for moving too fast to dismantle an unjust social apparatus; in essence, condemning him for doing what the Bible says. Apparently the white clergy had not read from their own Bibles the prophets' call for social justice. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:8)?" "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24)." Speaking in Bogota, Colombia, to a crowd estimated at close to one million, Pope Francis said, "It is of the greatest importance that we who call ourselves disciples not cling to a certain style or to particular practices that cause us to be more like some Pharisees than like Jesus."

Rather than mean-spirited and misdirected reaction to who's in the White House, we need to look again at this cross draped in the American flag. What does such an image say to us, if anything, or does it even matter? We need to look at Christianity in America and perhaps make a distinction between what it means to be Christian in America and what it means to be Christ-like. Many Christians walk the stately halls of Congress, yet make

policies that negatively affect the lives of “the least of these.” They are Christians in name but not in shaping public policy and laws that are fair and equitable. We need to look at the silence of the white church and weakness of the black church, both called to be at the forefront of a “new” and 21st century Great Awakening. For the church of Jesus Christ may be America’s best and last hope for renewal and redemption.

Let’s return for a moment to this idea of being Christian and being Christ-like. To be Christian in America is to adopt the American value system with its emphasis on success, hard work, racial entitlement and material prosperity. As a consequence, persons who are not successful according to their definition – persons who can’t work because of the lack of job opportunities, persons who have no entitlements because they weren’t born with silver spoons in their mouths, persons who are neither rich nor materially prosperous – are seen as lazy, criminal, unworthy to partake in the American dream.

And when this is mixed in a simmering pot of racial identity, the conclusion is that the poor, the marginalized, the uneducated, the unemployed, don’t deserve the benefits of this land, because if they weren’t so sorry and lazy they wouldn’t be in the shape they’re in. And, unfortunately, some who think that way come in all colors. Even many African-Americans who have broken through many of these barriers – they are rich, privileged, famous, well-connected – soon discover that the one thing they cannot escape is the color God made them.

These Christians have fashioned for themselves a God who has entitled them, and them alone, to the American dream. But for too many others, an American nightmare. And what for them is an American success story is for too many others an American tragedy. Listen to the lament of the weeping poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in, A minute to smile and an hour to weep in, A pint of joy to a peck of trouble, And never a laugh but the moans come double; And that is life!”

These Christians have dressed God in the red, white and blue and reduced Christianity to a quest for personal salvation, without disturbing or challenging the institutions and systems that promote and sanction racial inequality and social injustice. For them, the cross looks best, and is safest, when draped in the American flag, reminding us of Mahatma Gandhi’s famous words, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians.”

However, when we look at what it means to be Christ-like we see our Lord’s concern for people the religious leaders of his day despised. He eats with sinners and the outcast, protects the falsely accused, shows concern for the prisoner and announces that the meek shall inherit the earth. Though the text chosen for his trial sermon was familiar to his audience, the sermon itself, delivered from the synagogue in Nazareth, was a radical reinterpretation of who God favors. The text of his sermon was chosen from the prophecy of Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” The sermon

so enraged the religious leaders that they drove him out of town to the edge of a cliff and would have thrown him over, had he not been in God’s hands.

To be Christ-like is to show concern for the poor, the marginalized, the beggar at the gate, “the least of these,” as our Lord called them. To be Christ-like is to assign value to people the world despises. To be Christ-like is to care for our veterans who have sacrificed for our freedoms, to make sure no child or adult hungers, but also to provide health insurance for the have-nots and to show compassion for the alien and the stranger in the midst. For this land of spacious skies and amber waves of grain is not ours but belongs to God. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof...”

“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this (Deut. 24:19-22).”

The apostle Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome, cautions his hearers and us about being too comfortable with the world’s value systems, and that more often than not, those who love Christ must march to the beat of a different drummer. He writes, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you prove what is that good and acceptable will of God (Romans 12:1).” In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson puts it this way: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”

In my younger days as a student at Crozer Seminary we were required to read a book by H. Richard Niebuhr, brother of the noted theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, entitled *Christ and Culture*, a book that almost 50 years after I read it for the first time, continues to influence me. In it Niebuhr argues that Christ is not a tool to be manipulated by culture. Not the Christ in culture to be absorbed in the culture, thereby being made unrecognizable. Not even just a Christ of culture, sanctioning our cultural norms. Rather, Christ is the transformer of culture.

Many in the white church ignore the racist, misogynist, xenophobic, sexist voices given legitimacy in the last presidential campaign. Evangelical Christians, as they are called, in particular, have turned their heads the other way while their politicians spout bigoted, hateful and divisive vitriol directed against those who don’t look like them and others who don’t share the same political and religious views. Their warped view of American entitlement overshadows their embrace of the ethics of Jesus.

Seldom is there a prophetic voice heard from their pulpits. No denouncement of the divisive policies designed to fuel the enmity between races and cultures. No repudiation

of racist politics used throughout the history of this country, most notably in the previous century by Nixon (law and order), then Reagan (welfare queens) and Bush I (Willie Horton), into the 21st century and given new life in the last political campaign. And just yesterday we heard of talk by the attorney general of a return to law and order. Where were the voices of religious advisors to the White House in the aftermath of Charlottesville, when white supremacists chanted in a minor key their melodies of hatred and racial intolerance? I passed by a church and saw a cross draped in the American flag.

Among many Christians in America the flag and the national anthem have become gods to be worshipped, symbols of white privilege by those who confuse disrespect for the flag with peaceful protest against injustice. The flag is not God, and the national anthem is not our song of redemption. The same flag which is a symbol of freedom for some is also a symbol of injustice and inequality for others. Black soldiers who fought valiantly during World Wars I and II came home from the blood-soaked battlefields, and that same flag they fought under offered them no protection from the discrimination they faced back home and the deadly violence heaped upon them, simply because they wanted to enjoy the freedoms for which they had fought. Those who defend to the death the second amendment, which allows them to bear arms, refuse to be tolerant and civil toward those exercising their first amendment right of peaceful protest. It is easier to be defensive about a flag than to grapple with the issues of injustice and reconciliation.

When we turn to the black church, what do we find? The great pastor/theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while a student at New York's Union Theological Seminary in the 1930's, was taken one Sunday morning to a black Baptist church by his black friend and classmate, A. Franklin Fisher. When Bonhoeffer experienced the black church that Sunday morning, he later wrote, "I have finally heard the voice of Jesus preaching and teaching in the church of the outcasts of America."

Well, what has happened to the black church since Bonhoeffer's Sunday morning visit to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem? Now, historically, not all black churches and preachers embraced the prophetic implications of the Gospel. Not in the past and not today. Not all black preachers opened their arms and gave support to Dr. King and his call to transform America. By the end of his life Dr. King faced hostile criticism from the black press, from black leaders, from whites who previously had been sympathetic to the cause. Dr. King died a lonely, tortured soul because he refused to be confined and tamed by those who wanted to determine the limits of his prophetic witness. It was not the August 1963 *I Have a Dream* speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that disturbed America, but the sermon delivered a year before his death, April 4, 1967, from the ornate pulpit of New York's Riverside Church, a sermon entitled, *Beyond Vietnam*. From that famous pulpit where once was heard the provocative voice of Rev. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, King said, "My conscious leaves me no other choice."

If many in the white church suffer from "flag" worship, from draping the cross with the American flag, many in the black church suffer from having no cross to drape and for refusing no longer to be the church of the outcast and the voice of the oppressed and the powerless, the very people Jesus came to save. We are at our greatest strength when we speak for those without strength. We are most powerful when we speak for and to those without power. From too many pulpits in black churches across America today, there is no call for radical obedience to the will of God. No divine imperative. "...for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel," says Paul. No appeal to the "I must" of God. "I must be about my Father's business." "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day..."

Where is the power bequeathed to us by the one who called and equipped us? "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even them that believe on his name." The black church no longer sees itself – if ever it did – as Howard Thurman's church of the disinherited. Many of our churches today are run like corporations, with pastor as CEO and deacons and trustees as board of directors. Today many of our preachers are religious celebrities who preach safe sermons about how to be well-adjusted, how to have happy marriages and raise angelic children, how to climb the corporate ladder, how to realize one's inner potential (works without grace) and brag about their book deals and invitations to the White House. The voices that speak the loudest today are the voices of the profane, the intellectually shallow, the foul-mouthed comedians. In the pulpit the voices that speak the loudest are the voices of preachers who preach safe sermons that sooth us in our sins like a famous preacher I will not name who preaches to thousands each Sunday and never preaches about sin because he says it makes his people feel uncomfortable. The problem is that if you can't preach about sin there is no need for a Savior. It is the sinner who needs the Savior.

The black church is in danger of losing its power when it moves from authentic and transformative worship to an entertainment center. When rhythm replaces righteousness and song replaces sermon. When the pulpit becomes a stage. When the worshiper is no longer challenged by the claim Christ places on our lives. When preachers no longer wrestle with the text and sermons are full of tired religious sound bites and cheap clichés, void of theological content. When we confuse the treasure with the clay pot and think we are the treasure. When the congregation sees more of the preacher than of the Christ we represent. When many of our young preachers think they can make it on their natural gifts alone and dismiss the need for sound, theological training.

The black church is in danger when preachers mimic other preachers rather than finding and using their own voice. When our worship turns inward, satisfying our own need for self-aggrandizement. When we can no longer distinguish a joyful noise from a loud noise. When the lyrics of our songs are not biblical and lacking in theological integrity.

When lives are no longer transformed by the Gospel. When people are misled into believing that serving God costs nothing. When we anoint credit cards and use gimmicks to raise money and reduce God's blessings to material possessions, only. When we set preachers on their own thrones in their own little kingdoms. There is one throne and one king. There is one kingdom, the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. When we become so important until our own people can no longer touch us and speak to us. The cross does not wear the flag. The cross challenges the flag. Challenges our misplaced patriotism. Challenges our pride and nationalism. Challenges the hypocrisy of a nation that will not come to grips with its original sin.

The cross draped in the American flag or no cross at all? Will this be the legacy of the church in America? A cross, by the way, that even Jesus was tempted to by-pass as he knelt among the olive groves in a garden called Gethsemane. "Father, is there another way?" "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." But Jesus is Lord because of his obedience to God's will. That is why the writer of the book of Hebrews could say, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." I saw on the lawn of a church a cross draped in an American flag.

I know that a cross can't talk, and it can't move on its own. But I think that cross, on the lawn, in front of a church building, on sacred ground, ought to say something in protest or at least do something. Maybe the wind should blow and rip off that flag. Because as long as the flag is there, I can't see the blood of the lowly Galilean, who never owned property, never completed an ordination paper, never took systematic theology, never went to a church growth conference, never had a fleet of body guards. But his birth shook the foundations of the Roman empire and troubled Herod on his throne. I don't want to see a flag. I want to see on that cross the One who died for you and for me. So that now there is nothing between my soul and my Savior. I cannot sing until I see the cross and hear words from the dying Savior, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Then I can sing, *There is a fountain filled with blood...*

Then I can sing, *At the cross, at the cross...*

Then I can sing, *I know it was the blood...*

Then I can sing, *The blood that Jesus shed for me...*

Then I can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

J. Wendell Mapson, Jr. is pastor of Monumental Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He is the author of The Ministry of Music In The Black Church; Strange Fire: A Study of Worship and Liturgy in the African American Church and God of My Father: Sermons of a Father and Son. Dr. Mapson holds a B.A. from Morehouse College; an M.Div. from Crozer Theological Seminary (now Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School); and a D.Min. from Palmer Theological Seminary (formerly Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary). In 1994 he was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College.

Writing the Land

Emma Bell Miles Lecture, 2017 Mountain Heritage Literary Festival,
Lincoln Memorial University

Amy Wright

“A man born and bred in a vast wild land,” Emma Bell Miles writes in *The Spirit of the Mountains*, “learns to see Nature not as a thing of fields and brooks, friendly to man and docile beneath his hand, but as a world of depths and heights and distances illimitable, of which he is but a tiny part.”¹ She published these words in 1905. Reading them today, we cannot claim to be born or raised in a “vast wild land,” but there are some who still live in or among the oldest mountains on earth, which suggest the scale she describes. The Appalachians give us that sense of being part of a greater whole, but native Kentuckian Barbara Kingsolver recognizes that humans have razed or converted into farmland or strip mines many of the once wild areas. Still, Miles’ invokes a sense of realistic humility that over seven billion humans on this planet would do well to remember.

We are no “tiny part” of the Anthropocene, as some have suggested we rename our current geologic period to reflect the impact of humans on this planet. The Chernobyl plant disaster alone shot thirty-six metric tons of Uranium fuel into the air in 1986, which will still be releasing its radioactivity 4.5 billion years from now, give or take a few thousand centuries. There are examples of long term environmental devastation in every nation, including soil erosion due to deforestation, species loss, and hydraulic fracturing. Nowhere on the planet – even the Arctic – is insulated from human greed and shortsightedness.

While John Muir was advocating in 1901 for the preservation of National Parks, Miles was making a case for mountaineers’ connoisseurship of “pure water,” and “pure air,” even as she recognized the “oncoming tide of civilization, that drowns as many as it uplifts.”² *The Spirit of the Mountains* acknowledges the advantages of civilization, but Miles also recognizes that Appalachian customs were being devalued by comparison to urban and capitalist

priorities. She made clear that the true beauty of Appalachian heritage comes from becoming “better mountaineers instead of . . . poor imitation city people.”³ We see this dynamic on a global level now – where the successful but unsustainable Western model has spread worldwide with the rising quality of living. Higher standards of living are commendable, but the current model taxes water resources, pollutes streambeds with agricultural nitrates, and burns fossil fuels now measured in billions of tons annually. It also homogenizes culture and reduces local and regional cultural values.

The hope Miles had for the young people of Appalachia has not been realized. Their strength of character remains dormant and has yet to quicken American ideals.⁴ What reassures me among her list of this region’s unrealized potential is that Appalachia has at least become equipped with knowledge of its own existence. We can see this once insulated culture reflected against international models, which illustrate the particular strength of the mountain states.

One such strength is why Barbara Kingsolver was “called home,” as she describes in the introductory chapter of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.⁵ She moved from the desert ecosystem of Tucson, Arizona, to a farm in Virginia, in order to be able to plant vegetables, grow fruit, and buy enough local goods to feed her family. She and her husband brought their three children to this fertile land, familiar to her from her childhood in rural Kentucky, to reduce their carbon imprint. In the desert, following a three-year drought that put before their eyes day after day the real and present evidence of climate change still debated by individuals fortunate enough not to be impacted yet. It was apparent to her that our environmental debts are already past due. She also recognized that the accruing interest is not something we talk about in polite company. When she expresses surprise at being served fresh raspberries far out of season, her urban host dismisses her country bumpkin-like surprise with a casual, “This is New York. We can get anything we want, any day of the year.”⁶ Kingsolver doesn’t disgrace her friend by bringing up the hidden costs of shipping produce half way around the world, but she does use her book to discuss these and other costs. She also strives to rectify the damaging model personally by devoting a year of her family’s life to gardening their own food, buying locally, and waiting until vegetables, herbs, and fruits are in season.

Waiting is not something we are conditioned to respect as Americans, but I dare to hope that those who have what Emma Bell Miles calls “intimacy . . . from babyhood” with a land that produces wild mountain berries can grasp the importance of seasonal harvests and preserving them. Kingsolver expresses a similar sentiment, saying, “The people of southern Appalachia have a long folk tradition of using our woodlands creatively and knowing them intimately.”⁷

Kingsolver gives as examples the expertise available to mountaineers who spot and gather ramps, “molly moochers,” and wild greens. The flavor of wild harvests that by their very nature cannot be cultivated teach those who prize them the value of the treasure map that relays where and when to look for them.

Still another aspect of this intimacy is the recognition of dependence on the larger whole now known as ecosystem ecology. A morel mushroom might be plucked and cooked as a separate individual, but it was born of a vast underground fungus network dependent on forest sugars. The existence of a single mushroom indicates the health of an interlinked community that is largely invisible to us. Scientists have learned as much in the past few decades and come to acknowledge the importance of old-growth forests for fostering species that can only begin to thrive after several tree generations, each of which might take longer than a human lifetime.

Annie Dillard contemplates that world interlaced beneath our feet in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Sitting under a sycamore she says, “under me, directly under the weight of my body on the grass are other creatures, just as real, for whom also this moment, this tree, is ‘it.’”⁸ “Take just the top inch of soil,” she says, for there is a “world squirming right under my palms. In the top inch of forest soil, biologists found ‘an average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot, including 865 mites, 265 spring tails, 22 millipedes, 19 adult beetles and various numbers of 12 other life forms.’”⁹ She then wonders how many more creatures would be added if they counted the billions of fungi, protozoa and algae in a single teaspoon of soil. Like Miles, Dillard appreciates that we are but one of millions of creatures that call this planet home.

I find these writers’ courage to uphold human humility rather than to assert human dominance a distinctly feminine and perhaps even Appalachian strength of character. Theirs are voices that would serve us now to better heed, as they are more in line with the forest model, which teaches us to value foremost what the eldest members of a species provide. Western culture as a whole tends toward the opposite – valuing the newest members and latest contributions over ancient traditions, but Miles holds up Appalachian grandmothers as “repositories of tribal lore – tradition and song, medical and religious learning.”¹⁰ She calls them “old prophetesses,” who earn her reverence by their labors and sacrifices for neighbors and the ones they love. They are noble figures in her depiction, wise and sturdier than their frames suggest, but she neither romanticizes nor sentimentalizes them. Rather, she depicts them as the backbone of a community that cannot stand without their support, for “They are the nurses, the teachers of practical arts, the priestesses, and their wisdom commands the respect of all.”¹¹

In the age of the Internet their wisdom does not often command the respect of all. Growing seasons and botanical knowledge are considered relevant only for farmers, who have in large part been replaced by corporate strategists. Much practical knowledge has been lost too because it was undervalued. I think of how I stood at the foot of a font of botanical knowledge that was my great grandmother and did not drink. A master gardener in her own right, her knowledge of seasonal planting and food preservation helped feed her nine children, but it was her foraging expertise I have most come to mourn in her absence. Thanks to textbook illustrations and help from experts, I’ve been able to gather wild edibles

like the “creasy greens” she prepared. She likely intuited or tasted the rich nutritional quality science has since proven, since wild greens contain more phytochemicals than spinach and other cultivated “superfoods.”

I find comfort that other grandmothers and teachers preserved their knowledge in the form of essays and stories that can evolve a culture that better comprehends our dependence on plants, insects, and animal communities we can and can’t see. My hope is that we can learn from them as they learned from the ancient ridges around them, to hold a space sacred with their patience and presence.

I’ll close with two passages from Dillard who stalked Virginia’s Roanoke Valley where I grew up. Speaking to the trees, she says, “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.”¹² This passage is in conversation with another thirty pages before, in which she says:

The shadow’s the thing. Outside shadows are blue because they are lighted by the blue sky and not the yellow sun. Their blueness bespeaks infinitesimal particles scattered down inestimable distance... So shadows define the real. If I no longer see shadows as ‘dark marks,’ as do the newly sighted, then I see them as making some sort of sense of the light. They give the light distance; they put it in its place.¹³

Might such understanding help put the rest of us in our place, as stewards of the land in accordance with its standard of values, as Miles hoped?

Notes

- 1 Emma Bell Miles, *Spirit of the Mountains*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).
- 2 Ibid. p. 190.
- 3 Ibid. p. 198.
- 4 Ibid. p. 200-201.
- 5 Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).
- 6 Ibid. p. 66.
- 7 Miles, p. 7.
- 8 Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1974), p. 95.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Miles, p. 37.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Dillard, p. 93.
- 13 Ibid. p. 63.

Amy Wright is the author of Everything in the Universe, Cracker Sonnets, and five chapbooks. Based in Tennessee, she also co-authored Creeks of the Upper South, a lyric reflection on waterways and cultural habitats. Her writing has been awarded two Peter Taylor Fellowships for the Kenyon Review Writers' Workshop, and an Individual Artist's Fellowship from the Tennessee Arts Commission. She is a Creative Writing Professor at Austin Pea State University. For more information visit www.awrightawright.com.

POETRY + THEOLOGY

Echoes from the Acropolis

Katy Giebenhain

Imagine standing between columns of banned books in different languages wrapped in plastic. Not just any columns, an enormous replica of the Parthenon. Imagine *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity*, *The Poet in New York*, *The Little Prince*, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the company of around 10,000 other books officially forbidden at one time or another. This is what visitors to the art event Documenta experienced in Kassel, Germany.

This past summer Documenta 14 was held in Kassel and in Athens, Greece. A contemporary art exhibit now held every five years, Documenta is one of the most significant international art events in the world. The installation *The Parthenon of Books* by Argentinian artist Marta Minujín tapped into all kinds of significance for its geography, its content and its opportunities for public involvement. Minujín's *Parthenon* is present when I'm thinking about Luther's work for accessibility of scripture, Gutenberg's printing revolution and the impending anniversary of the Protestant Reformation as this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review* heads for the press. An old thing freshly seen, *The Parthenon of Books* offers writers of poems and sermons some poignant reminders.

Greece is considered the birthplace of democracy. It's in a phase of financial austerity and a complicated relationship with the European Union. Both Germany and Greece are navigating how to respond to an influx of refugees. What about experiences of censorship in Argentina? Germans who went to Argentina after WW II? The role of architecture and public art in 2017? The fact that Pope Francis is from Argentina? The installation is bursting with political implications for personal and national identity.

The first Documenta was held in the summer of 1955. Arnold Bode, a painter and professor, wanted to present art that the Nazis had forbidden from being exhibited internationally. It was rather brave to gather artists from recent enemy countries in a provincial part of post-war Germany.¹ *The Parthenon of Books* was erected on Friedrichsplatz in Kassel where

some two thousand books were burned during the so-called 'Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist' (Campaign against the Un-German Spirit). In 1941, the Frid-ericianum – which was still being used as a library at the time – was engulfed in flames during an Allied bombing attack, and another collection of some 350,000 books was lost... Minujín's *The Parthenon of Books* traces its origins to an installation titled *El Partenón de libros*, which was realized in 1983, shortly after the collapse of the civilian-military dictatorship in Argentina, and presented the very books that had been banned by the ruling junta.²

Writers of sermons and poems go about distilling meaning and carrying it with imagination and attention. This temporary Parthenon was built of scaffolding. It is overwhelming in a cool way. I like to think of all of the hands that brought these books to the collection points in Athens and Kassel, and of all the publishers and authors and editors involved in bringing these books into circulation. The books share the distinction of being officially banned at some point, and they serve as a chilling reminder that this kind of control is not strictly a thing of the past.

We cannot take for granted the ability to share ideas, to experiment, to reconsider, to praise and to call out danger. We are absolutely inundated with text from all directions now. This does not change our responsibility for what we say and how we say it (which calls to mind Luther's remark "You are not only responsible for what you say, but also for what you do not say.")

Let the image of Documenta 14's *The Parthenon of Books* delight and nudge you forward in your writing. You are in the company of those who have gone before you, but you are also addressing a very specific group of people in a specific context. Writing is about much more than content. The *way* meaning is carried is sometimes the distinction between a solid sermon and a great one, or one that is listened to and one that is slept through. What can you hang on the scaffolding of your sermon, or the form of a poem? How can you verbally build a pop-up Parthenon?

To see photos of *The Parthenon of Books* look online or stop by the Communication Office on the Gettysburg campus of United Lutheran Seminary. Documenta 14 featured many other exhibits, individual works and events, including an ensemble performance with horses and riders departing from the Acropolis for a 1,850-mile journey to Kassel called *The Athens-Kassel Ride: The Transit of Hermes*.³

Learn more about the Documenta at www.documenta.de/en.⁴

Notes

- 1 "The Documenta in Kassel: One of the World's Most Important Art Shows," *Deutsche Welle*, September 16, 2015. www.dw.com/en/the-documenta-in-kassel-one-of-the-worlds-most-important-art-shows/a-18584847. Accessed September 15, 2017.
- 2 "Call: Donate books for The Parthenon of Books," *Universes in Universe – Worlds of Art* <https://universes.art/documenta/2017/parthenon-of-books/>. Accessed September 15, 2017.
- 3 Dokumenta 14 posting for the event by artist Ross Birrell *The Athens-Kassel Ride: The Transit of Hermes*. www.documenta14.de/en/venues/15306/dionysiou-areopagitou. Accessed September 15, 2017.
- 4 Holland Cotter's article "Documenta Kassel: Using Art as Their Witness," *New York Times*, June 23, 2017 is another source of photos and background. Visit www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/arts/design/documenta-kassel-using-art-as-their-witness.html. Accessed September 15, 2017.

We Welcome our Poets

This issue includes poems by Martha Serpas (Texas), Faith Shearin (West Virginia), Pádraig Ó Tuama (Northern Ireland), Adam Timbs (Tennessee), Brynn Saito (California), Lou Ella Hickman (Texas) and Steve Knepper (Virginia). Book recommendations are for *Still Pilgrim* by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, *Revising the Storm* by Geoffrey Davis, *An Explanation of Poetry to my Father* by Glenn Colquhoun, *For Filthy Women Who Worry about Disappointing God* by Seema Yasmin and *The Collected Poems* by Jack Gilbert.

Book Recommendations

Revising the Storm

While *Revising the Storm* is not an overtly religious collection it is a good book for writers of sermons and for those engaged in mature reflection of family dynamics and memory. I am reminded of the introduction to Gerry LaFemina's *Composing Poetry: A Guide to Writing Poems and Thinking Lyrically*. He says "See, I don't believe people who think differently write poetry, but rather writing and reading poems help teach us to think differently."¹

This is exactly what I mean when I recommend that preachers expose themselves to poetry. Some of this will spill over. It does not simply benefit the listeners of sermons but the writers as well. It helps us to think differently about the familiar things we are confronted with and how to ride the tides of tension between scripture and what we see, taste, hear and know about the world we stand in.

I love the way Geoffrey Davis holds the present and past in "Teaching Twelve-Year-Olds the Trail of Tears," as beginning in the second stanza

... *It was an odd kind of murder –
the killing of hope, blanketed backs and wagons
diminishing into a ribbon of exiled dots*

among the thickening smoke of 1838. Matt, stop
drawing on school property. Memorize the map, Class,
all eight inches of hashed texture – one for every

hundred miles of terrain, pocked by makeshift graves – (50)

Masculinity, race, memory, personal and societal expectations come through in this collection. Davis uses lots of enjambment and careful crafting of the lines so that the reader is guided at the tempo he sets. It suits the poet's voice.

Here's the end of "What my Father Might Say if I let him Speak:"

I showed you what the living can do

and call love – that a man can rise, coughing
from the ashes of himself,
and go back down again, like prayer. (42)

A couple of other poems I would like to call out are "Ode to Trout" and "What I Mean When I Say Elijah-Man" which includes an epigraph from 2 Kings about a father testifying in church while a watching son experiences his own growing awareness of the layers of his father's identity. Readers get an exploration of fatherhood from multiple directions with fractured and realistic examples.

Revising the Storm is published by BOA Editions, Ltd. (Rochester, N.Y.: 2014). It won the 2013 A. Poulin Jr. Prize. Visit www.boaeditions.org. Davis teaches in the English Department at the University of Arkansas.

Note

- 1 Gerry LaFemina, *Composing Poetry: A Guide to Writing Poems and Thinking Lyrically* (Dubuque, IA, Kendal Hunt, 2016), 1.

Still Pilgrim

The persona of the still pilgrim in this book is not one-dimensionally still. Even the fact that this is a collection of sonnets is a bit misleading because they are not sonnets in the same way. There are changes in stanzas and the rhyme is practiced hands. For a collection this cohesive it is surprisingly pleasing that each poem has its own personality.

Parts of our lives feel like a pilgrimage by default. O'Donnell has an interesting way of acknowledging loss. She calls it out but in a natural way rather than a begrudging or mourning way.

Readers shadow the persona of the still pilgrim through life stages. This book is full of spirituality and straight-talk. Don't miss the open-hearted Beatitudes, or the touching yet unsentimental observances about mothers in "The Still Pilgrim Honors her Mother" and "The Still Pilgrim Considers Home Economics." Among the epigraphs are those from the likes of St. Teresa of Ávila, St. Catherine of Siena, Denise Levertov, the U.S. National Library of Medicine and Flannery O'Connor (O'Connor's "She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they killed her quick" starts O'Donnell's poem "The Still Pilgrim Considers her Options.") (9)

I appreciate the frankness in the Christ-among-us poem "The Still Pilgrim Considers Christ's Table Manners" and the truth about diagnosis and bad news from doctors, among other themes.

The collection opens with a poem to set the tone for a journey.

Prologue: To Be a Pilgrim

To be a pilgrim is to ring the stones
with the clean music of your best black heels,
each click a lucky strike that sparks a fire
to see by, that lights up the long and level road
you walk with no map, no stick, no wheels
to relieve you when your feet ache and tire.

To be a pilgrim own what you own,
stuff it in your clutch, lug it in your tote,
all the heavy history you'd like to lose
nestled up against your dead mother's shoes.
To be a pilgrim you must be a killer
of myth, a new invention of desire.
Every pilgrim is a truth-teller.
Every pilgrim is a liar. (xiii)

The book really is a unit, so calling out individual poems doesn't quite feel justified. I do have to mention "The Still Pilgrim Considers Sicily" and "The Still Pilgrim Hears a Diagnosis" and "The Still Pilgrim Considers a Hard Teaching" as especially timely.

The afterword is interesting for preachers, too. "Any form of writing constitutes a journey for the writer, still as she may seem to stay." (71) The illusion of stillness and how the act of writing contributes to being a pilgrim "in the present and in the ruins of her own past." (71) Learn how a visit to Herman Melville's grave sparked what would become this collection.

O'Donnell teaches at Fordham University where she is Associate Director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies.

"Prologue: To Be a Pilgrim" is used by permission of Paraclete Press. *Still Pilgrim* by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell © 2017 by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell. Visit Paraclete Press (Brewster, Massachusetts): www.paracletepress.com.

An Explanation of Poetry to my Father

Unless you grew up surrounded by pastors (and of course some of you have – you learned to walk in parsonage hallways and the church is the family business) well, if that's not the case, you'll sometimes get baffled looks and questions about what the heck it is you do and why. The very idea and purpose of sermon-writing amongst all of the other things pastors do can be viewed with an impatient skepticism. There's a very small book by Glenn Colquhoun which I think many preachers should keep in their libraries. We included a reprint of his poem "The Heart Attack" in the Spring 2015 issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.

Colquhoun's father worked in construction. No one in his family had been into poetry. A doctor and a writer, he is a super listener and watcher of the world. Before going to medical school he attended seminary. He's a wry observer of himself as well. He tries to explain poetry in his father's language.

The final poem, "To a Man of Few Words" is enough to make the book worthwhile on its own. The opening "An Apology" is just the right poem to begin with.

Preachers and poets engage in acts of cultural translation. If you want to be understood you have to think about the reader/listener. It is not simply about what you want to express. Here are a couple of examples from the sectioned prose poem "The Word as a Tool:"

Ellipses are screwdriver sets – Philips, slotheads, Allen keys in a full range of sizes. They can be used to increase the torque inside a poem.

Verbs are Estwing hammers, 20 ounce, full metal shaft, comfortable plastic composite handles with a non-slip rip and claw head. Ideal for putting some whack into a sentence. They come in black and blue and have a good feel hung from a leather pouch firm against your thigh. (32)

This book is sharp, entertaining and useful for the way that it relates to vocation. It is good for anyone who works with words.

An Explanation of Poetry to my Father is published by Steele Roberts Ltd. (Aotearoa, New Zealand). Visit: steelersroberts.co.nz.

For Filthy Women who Worry about Disappointing God

Another gem of a chapbook (little book) is Seema Yasmin's 19-poem offering of questions, holding up of double standards and simply praising desire. These are poems from a source.

If you are easily offended this is a book to stay clear of. Some of the references are explicit. Otherwise, I recommend it. This book will scrub open your assumptions. Take this stanza from “Polymath:”

If haram means forbidden
and haram means sacred space
then haram is an inbetween place (7)

In “Sister” she begins “Do not pray into the mouths of men / Who swallow your incantations like vitamins.” (17)

And from this voice comes an effective lament on police brutality in “hunted”

you cannot take me downtown
because the shooter was a Black man
which means
 there will be no negotiations (16)

Religion and sex intersect. That’s a fact. Too often, and in too many overt and subtle ways, religion is used to control women’s bodies. Yasmin is not having it. She is refreshingly direct.

Seema Yasmin is a doctor, journalist, professor and poet currently based in Texas. She is particularly interested in public health and engaging people with stories about epidemic investigations. Visit: www.seemayasmin.com. *For Filthy Women Who Worry about Disappointing God* is published by Diode Editions (Doha, Qatar). Visit: www.diodeeditions.com.

The Collected Poems

The late Jack Gilbert was one of the big dogs of American poetry. His *Collected Poems* has been lauded by *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Poetry*, *The Los Angeles Times* and many others. This is not a review. I offer a mini-tour of the collected poems for those who preach and therefore write. Think of it as a kind of mixed tape. Those of you alive in the 1980’s will know what I mean by that.

In a 2006 interview on NPR, Jack Gilbert reflected on his relatively sparse list of publications: “It’s not a business with me . . . I’m not a professional of poetry, I’m a farmer of poetry.”¹ There is a sense of this in great preaching. A farmer. Boy are we hungry for this kind of preaching now. So here you go. Let his writing sink in a bit. You’ll see what I mean. Try these poems:

Poetry is a Kind of Lying
Sects
The Forgotten Dialect of the Heart
The Spirit of the Soul
Adulterated
Tasters for the Lord
Leporello on Don Giovanni
Half the Truth
Résumé
Failing and Flying
Less being More
Horses at Midnight Without a Moon
Trouble
In the Beginning

The idea for this list began by reading “The Forgotten Dialect of the Heart” in a craft talk by Geoffrey Davis at the West Virginia Writers Workshop in July 2017. In “Failing and Flying” the line “Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew” (228) is such a twist. I want sermons to start like this! Much about useful, charged writing has to do with how we approach the text or the subject and how we look at what others gloss over or simply repeat. There is more to Icarus than that one scene. Another of these which is interesting for writers, including effective preachers is from “Poetry is a Kind of Lying:”

Degas said he didn’t paint
what he saw but what
would enable them to see
the thing he had. (52)

Remind you of a certain parable-slinging carpenter?

The Collected Poems is available from Alfred A. Knopf (New York: 2014). Visit: knopfdoubleday.com.

Note

1 www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jack-gilbert. Accessed September 15, 2017.

Family Tree

Pádraig Ó Tuama

They say Satan teased Sarah while
her husband tied their son up on a mountain.
It's an old story: a man tests the limits of religion
while the devil's on a mission to a woman.

The devil said *He's dead! Oh wait! He's not!*
Sarah heard a gunshot
and did the only thing she could.
She reached beyond herself and died.

Meanwhile Isaac sees a frenzy
on the face of a patriarch,
and an angel's screaming out a name
and everything's going dark. Afterwards,

they never spoke again. One went
his way and the other went another.
Isaac's mother dead, he followed Hagar
to the desert. Hagar married Abraham

but Isaac stayed away, didn't even send a
text. He pulled the blinds down, tried to rest.
Then his father died, so God blessed Isaac, Isaac
never quite recovered from the loss.

Then Rachel came along and saw it all.
She'd studied Freud, so knew her boys would
tell stories that their father couldn't bear.
She tore her hair out, then devised a plan.

But even she was foiled; her boys grew up.
Her boys forgot the fights of childhood, spat out
bitter herbs, and limped towards each other
when the Angel settled down at last.

There may not be a God or a Sarah.
There may not be a garden or a man who
ordered soup up to his room.
There may not be a mountain.

But there's always been a woman with the truth.
But there's always been a brother full of shame.
There's always been a story, and there's
always been a devil in the details.

Jacob and Esau

One day I repented my resentment because I realised I'd forgotten to repeat it. For a while – no, for a long while – it was like a prayer, rising to the skies, morning after morning, like a siren that wouldn't quiet.

And then I remembered other things: the way I walk lighter these days; the way you never knew my story of divorce; the way I am tired of being forced among the new; and the way I miss having someone to speak to about things I don't need to explain; the way we shared a name.

So I decided.

I took a flight and hung around the areas where we used to meet. I loitered with intent. I was hungry with hope but couldn't eat alone. I missed the home your body was, even though we're grown now, I missed your smell, your wrestle, your snoring breath.

And when I saw you, I saw you'd changed too. So much behind us we didn't need to name. I touched your arm. You wrapped it round me. Brothers again.

Pádraig Ó Tuama is the leader of the Corrymeela Community (Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation center). A poet, theologian and group worker, his books include In the Shelter: Finding a Home in the World, Sorry for your Troubles and Readings from the Book of Exile. His B.A. in Divinity is from Maryvale Institute. His M.Th. is from Queens University Belfast. Ó Tuama is a blog contributor to On Being with Krista Tippett. Visit: www.padraigotuama.com and www.corrymeela.org.

Milking on Christmas Morning

For David Middleton

Steve Knepper

Behind me sits our barn beneath some stars that draw no awestruck wise men from afar. Its bedding straw is tousled with manure and steaming urine pools its concrete floor.

It holds no donkeys, camels, lambs, or sheep but fifty Holsteins hungry from their sleep and ready for our work to bring relief to udders swollen near the point of grief.

I crack the ice that glassed the water trough then go back to warmth the cows give off, to what is not that scene of adoration but still reveals the depths of incarnation.

Steve Knepper teaches literature and writing at Virginia Military Institute. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as Pembroke Magazine, The American Journal of Poetry, SLANT, Presence, Third Wednesday, Floyd County Moonshine, The Indianola Review, and The Rotary Dial. His Ph.D. is from the University of Virginia. He grew up on a dairy farm in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Displorations in the Desert

Brynn Saito

Tuesday, late October. We wake at 5am to drive to the Manzanar National Historic Site- my mother, my father, and I.

I drive the first leg, to Weedpatch. My father drives the second. “Welcome to The Other Side of California,” reads the sign at Lone Pine.

Bright yellow flowers, desert shrubs, Sahara mustard. The bluest sky. Mountains rise around us like sleeping, steadfast bodies.

In Manzanar, from 1942-1945, the U.S. Government incarcerated approximately 10,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry.

541 babies were born during the wartime incarceration.

Summer temperatures rose above 100 degrees. Winters were ice. People used tin can lids to cover knotholes in the floor when dust storms raged.

The earth outdoes herself, the earth sets you free, the earth says hello/goodbye.

Two barracks, reconstructed for the public. One watchtower – one of the eight guard towers, rebuilt. Otherwise, nothing on the grounds but plots marked for other ghost spaces: hospital, administration, gardens, cemetery, general store.

A white stone Buddhist memorial stands against the wind, Mt. Whitney in the background.

We drive around the site, stopping occasionally to get closer to the absence.

The earth gives you her best shoulder, the earth gives you the skin off her back.

My father’s mother, Alma Teranishi, met her husband, Mitsuo Saito, in the camps. “She went in with one name and came out with another,” says my cousin.

They were college-aged when evacuated. Sent to Gila River, Arizona – the location of one of two internment camps in the American southwest.

Alma said: “They packed us in like sardines,” when describing the train ride from the assembly center to Gila River.

Alma said: “I used to lie and say I was Chinese.” Meanwhile, my mother’s mother, during the war, wore a button around town that read: *I am Korean.*

The earth gives you the night air and nighttime breezes across a sleeping desert. The earth gives you the sweet elixir of sage and rain.

The Japanese have a saying: “Shikata ga nai.” Nothing can be done about it. In the Manzanar gift shop, we buy a polished stone with the phrase engraved on it.

Next to the gift shop, in the museum, I take a photo of my father standing under a photo of a sign: Japs Keeps Moving. This is a White Man’s Neighborhood.

The earth is a traffic of broken hearts, the earth reminds you of your own death, which makes you glad.

The three of us eat dinner at the Bonanza Mexican Restaurant, visit the local pharmacy, spend the night at the Best Western Motel.

The earth listens when the ghosts forget you.

The ghosts forget to tell you they’re going to die soon.

The night gives you stones, sand, voices, dreams. You take it all in, like a child. Your palms swallow everything.

You throw everything against glass and the glass shatters into sharp sunlight.

Sparks light the way.

The next morning, after the breakfast buffet, we walk for awhile in the bright desert light, then begin the drive home. My father drives the first leg; I drive the second.

In the desert, the ghost girls are free now, they play in the garden and give water to the yellow flowers with their cupped palms, though there is no water, there is the dream of water, which is enough for the girls and the flowers.

In the desert, the ghost girls live off their own ideas.

For awhile, I didn't have any ideas. I lived squarely in the world of brittlebush and Joshua tree, the Eastern Sierras rising like a shadow history.

I looked at my mother and I looked at my father, the three of us not saying much. We hardly said anything at all. The wind across the desert brought voices. We listened to the voices.

Render voices to meet the weight of stone.

I can't imagine –

I stood in the place of the barracks, arms out, idea-less. Revealing, for once, in the silence. I didn't run from the silence, the silence felt like freedom, like dipping my mind into a cool stream after days of walking the hard slope of a mountain.

Now the ghosts are everywhere. They are free to roam. We've unleashed them in their entirety.

"Displorations in the Desert" is reprinted with permission of Red Hen Press (Pasadena, California) from Power Made Us Swoon. Brynn Saito is also the author of The Palace of Contemplating Departure (winner of the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award). She co-authored, with Traci Brimhall, the chapbook Bright Power, Dark Peace. She directs the Center for Writing and Scholarship at California Institute of Integral Studies and is an adjunct faculty member in the M.F.A. program at UC San Francisco. The co-founder and Director of the Center for Spiritual Life, Saito teaches in Kearny Street Workshop's Interdisciplinary Writers Lab for Bay Area writers of color. Brynn Saito holds degrees from Sarah Lawrence College, New York University, and UC Berkeley. Visit brynnsaito.com and redben.org.

Malnutrition

Lou Ella Hickman

adam of the earth
 eve soon to be mother of all
 ate
 in so doing
 stirred into everything
 the thistled pangs of hunger

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S., has been an all level teacher and a librarian. Presently she is a freelance writer and a spiritual director. Her poems and articles have appeared in numerous magazines. One of her poems was published in the anthology After Shocks: Poetry of Recovery for Life-Shattering Events edited by Tom Lombardo. Her first book of poetry, she: robed and wordless, was released in 2015 by Press 53.

Papaw's Back-Hill Theology and Our Prayer of Transformation

Adam Timbs

If I could be light
I'd be a thing
worked through something,
like a silver ribbon of moon quickening
the cold face of night water.

If only I might become
a pillar of bronze
light hung up in trees
of September Evenings,
I could smolder through
an iron mind of memory in winter.
And then
when good weather comes,
I'd cool to shades
of cinder in a potter's spent kiln.
A dogwood light bright
in April, the kind that don't
get dark in the rain.

I could be what prayers are
once they exit the mouth, the heart.
We could be a thing worked
through something with shape,
beauty that comes slow and easy.

And I'll tell you something else,
a finch has got a light
flashing in his eye;
it belongs to him freely.
I once saw one light

on a piece of field grass,
brown and stalked with seed.
I thought his golden body doomed
to fall, his hollow bones
heavy even for husks.
But he unwound his wings
and clutched the bending grass,
a lover's knot weaving beneath him
as he sunk to earth.
Every stitch of muscle,
feather, and claw bound within
a happening never coming again.

Oh God,
let me fall
as a finch; silent,
useful and hidden.
There must be something framed
inside me still whole,
yet to be riven
from its first shape.
We must now
be still,
unmoving and dark
like oaks after heavy rain.

Adam Timbs is a candidate for a Master's in English at East Tennessee State University. His main points of study are poetry and Medieval Literature. He grew up in Johnson County, Tennessee where he still returns to tend the farm when he can. Timbs currently lives in Johnson City and works for The Department of Environment and Conservation.

One Sometimes Finds What One Is Not Looking For

Faith Shearin

Imagine Alexander Fleming returning to his lab after a two week vacation; he was not as tidy as some of the other scientists and, while he was away, an open window blew mold into his petri dishes; one, blue and green, seemed to be eating the bacteria that grew there. This was 1928 in London, where it often rains, and I think sometimes of the window itself, propped open because someone was hot, or wanted air, and the sound of afternoon thunderstorms. *One sometimes finds what one is not looking for* Fleming said after he named the mold penicillin, and wrote a paper about it, saving nearly everyone in my family at least once. His lab was messy, I guess, which is how the accident happened, and maybe he was happy after his trip, dreaming of oysters or cakes, some dappled afternoon drinking tea beneath the trees. I praise that open window, his mess, the mold drifting in.

Grendel's Mother

You can imagine how she felt when she found her son's hand.
She wanted something more than revenge.
Don't most wars begin and end in grief?
It makes no difference who lives in the castle and who lives in the swamp.
Anyone can be a monster.
The truth is on fire.

Only an ocean is as beautiful and dangerous as fire.
There are maps in every hand.
The things we fear become monsters.
Love is as ancient as revenge.
Grendel's mother knew each chamber of their swamp.
She had seen Cain wet with grief.

Cain was thin with neglect, chilled by grief.
He trembled, even beside a fire.
East of Eden, he found this swamp.
Sometimes he stared into the mystery of his own hand.
Had he been ruined by revenge?
Was he a monster?

The people of the village called Grendel a monster.
It is true: his appetites caused them grief.
They spent years plotting revenge:
saw his shape move through their fires,
knew he could rip them apart with his huge hands.
His origins were as murky as his swamp.

It is difficult to navigate in a swamp.
Something hungry lurks beneath the surface;
death might reach for you like a hand.
Trees hang low over the waters of grief.
Light a fire;
plan your revenge.

After all, the world begins and ends with stories of revenge.
 It is always night in the swamp.
 Each sword is forged in fire.
 Only you know the name of your monster.
 Only you know the depths of your grief.

"Grendel's Mother" is reprinted with permission of the author from Orpheus, Turning (Milton, Delaware: The Broadkill River Press, 2015). "One Sometimes Finds What One Is Not Looking For" is a new poem. Orpheus, Turning is Shearin's fifth collection of poetry. Others include The Empty House and Moving the Piano. Her poems have frequently been read on Garrison Keillor's The Writer's Almanac. She has received awards from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and The Barbara Deming Memorial Fund. Visit: faithshearin.com.

St. Gabriel's Temporary Morgue

Martha Serpas

Rafael says the dead never complain.
 But they do. They moan constantly, their mouths
 great cave dwellings without fires.
 True their skin palls at low tide
 with drying algae and petroglyphs
 and no denying those old-yolked eyes
 can't convey any emotional range,
 but settle on one nameless passion
 I'd call blank wisdom: a fill-in-the without
 a need to complete. Infinite light is no longer light
 and needn't be registered by the eyes.
 We believe they are at peace because we
 are, thinking they've said their last,
 that drain pipe we hear as a rattle.

Martha Serpas is professor of English in the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. She is the author of The Diener, The Dirty Side of the Storm and Côte blanche. Her work has appeared in The New Yorker, The Nation, Southwest Review and elsewhere, including the Library of America's American Religious Poem and The Art of the Sonnet. She holds degrees in English and creative writing from Louisiana State, New York University, and the University of Houston, and an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. She remains active in efforts to restore Louisiana's wetlands. Since 2006 she has worked as a trauma chaplain at Tampa General Hospital. Visit: www.marthaserpas.com.

FINE ARTS

What Hath the Reformation Wrought?

Gerald Christianson

The late Professor Leigh Jordahl once remarked, matter-of-factly and without a hint of denigration, that the only significant contribution of Lutheranism to culture was Johann Sebastian Bach. Reformation specialists would be quick to add modern German, shaped by Luther's Bible; still others, the Lutheran parsonage, although this has had its controversial side in recent years. A glance at *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* indicates a garden full of new composers and hymn writers, including our own Herman Stuempfle, the late president of the seminary.

Nevertheless, our colleague's generalization has more than a morsel of truth, enough to give us pause as we celebrate a momentous anniversary. Reflecting Numbers 23:23 (not to mention the first Morse code message in America), we are bound to ask: what hath the Lutheran heritage wrought? Who or what can we name besides Bach?

Were it my assignment to survey the Lutheran contribution to society, I could have regaled readers with tales of J. H. Wichern and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh in the nineteenth century who, despite their current anonymity, were the founders of an Evangelical social service that survives and flourishes today. Or, despite the general impression that the Lutheran Church was compliant, one could point to twentieth-century Nazi-resisters like Martin Niemöller, Hanns Lilje, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Our subject, however, is culture in the narrower sense of those things that give meaning to our lives, especially music and the arts. To the historian, and any person who seeks to make informed and balanced judgments, this makes our task even more challenging. Determining exact evidence of religious influences in the arts can be a steep hill to climb. In fact, if Jordahl is correct, this could be one of the shortest essays ever published in the *Review*.

On the other hand, I suggest that we start from a different perspective. Historians are said to be the guardians of the particular. If so, rather than the big stars of a general culture like Bach, we can begin with those considerable gifts that are the life-blood of the

Reformation movement, gifts like scripture, Luther's theology, engagement with the world around us, and the promise of our congregations.

Behind everything that constitutes the Lutheran heritage, we have the gift of scripture. We didn't need the Reformation to discover that the Bible has authority. We needed the Reformation to discover the gospel in the Bible. Yet, to make our quest more than an esoteric pursuit by a few artsy types, we need biblical directives beyond the necessarily oft-repeated proclamation of justification by faith and our freedom from anxiety over salvation by adding up our daily works. The prologue to the Gospel of John, all of First John, and the early chapters of Genesis celebrate God's love of, and our mandate to care for, creation. In these remarkable chapters, we don't bring God into the world as if he's not already there.

Paul is never more interesting than when he struggles to articulate the cosmic dimensions of Christ's incarnation breaking into this earthly realm. "We know," he writes to the Romans, "that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now." Only after he emphasizes this cosmic dimension does he follow with the personal insight: "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Rm. 8:22-23)

This is our invitation to celebrate arts and artists – musicians, painters, poets – who give words, sounds, images to those inarticulate groans that long for the consummation, our return to God and wholeness. When we listen to Bach, we often hear a direct and immediate explication of a gospel text, especially in his cantatas. In the post-modern era, however, we are more likely to get only a hint of things beyond ourselves, beyond the travails of these troubled times, straining to give birth to a future yet to be revealed. Perhaps in these moments we sense only fragments, perpetrated by our brokenness. Still, even fragments can provide a sense of striving for the whole mosaic.

The Reformer would not be averse to this perspective. The gift of Luther, however, is not as obvious as it might seem. The Luther we need here is the lesser-known Luther hidden behind justification, the priesthood of all believers, and the two kingdoms. This is the Johannine Christian, the singer of creation, the poet of the everyday, the lute player and composer of chorales celebrated by Bach.

We need go no further than Luther's lectures on Genesis (1535-36). Although some parts show the hand of a later editor, the voice of the Wittenberg professor can still be heard offering a liberating word in the current controversies over creationism and global warming. A creature of his times, Luther never questions that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, that the universe is a hierarchy, or that God made the world in six days. But what dynamic days! God, he declares, is "incomprehensible in His essential rest before the creation of the world, but now, after the creation, He is within, without, and above all creatures."¹

A little-known aside reveals a surprising twist to this assertion. Luther objects to an earlier papal condemnation of a group called the Anthropomorphites because they ascribed human characteristics such as eyes, ears, and arms to God. "How could we speak otherwise

of God," he objects. The condemnation renders a verdict "concerning the salvation of all children who think and speak of God in this childlike fashion." In fact, so must doctors of theology, and scripture, and anyone who believes that "God has eyes with which to behold the poor; that He has ears, with which to hear those who pray."²

From beginning to end, God's presence is through the Word, restless in creation and offered to us in preaching and sacraments, but always under a veil or mask. Of all the masks by which God reveals a loving self, none is more astonishing than the incarnation when God breaks decisively into creation. Luther had already astounded his opponents with his doctrine of ubiquity. Not just Christ, but Christ in his humanity is everywhere that God is.

Consequently, it is safe to conclude, Luther would be entirely comfortable with the Big Bang. Word precedes matter. God says, "Light," and bang! The atoms coalesce around this swirling, explosive energy. We can still hear it. It's the "music of the spheres" so long sought by the ancients right up to Copernicus and Bach.

From the sounds of nature to the songs he heard in the tavern, Luther loved music. No more explicit expression of his attitude can be found than in his *Preface to the Wittenberg Hymnal* (1524):

Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy and blight all the arts, as some of the pseudo-religious claim. But I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them.³

Now comes the harder part. Can the gifts of scripture and Luther help us uncover gifts in the public square where most of the arts are practiced today? Music and the arts have always formed an essential element of who we are as worshipping Lutherans. We celebrate word and sacrament in a liturgy that is infused with music, poetry, visuals, spoken word, and movement, all within architectural spaces that speak to us about who God is. Yet, when we turn outward in public leadership, we would be remiss if we failed to embrace music and the arts in the term "public."

In a perhaps feeble attempt to discover these gifts out there in the world, I want to suggest that we reverse of an old cliché, too often laid upon poor, over-abused St. Thomas: not seeing is believing, but believing is seeing. From this standpoint, and without denying the facts of life or becoming a spiritual elite, we might begin to penetrate how the gospel relates to general culture, if not often directly, at least as it raises the modern question in new ways.

Perhaps only a few will nod approval when I say that the past century has been a great age of religious literature and music. Nevertheless, we've had authors such as W. H. Auden, C. S. Lewis, Graham Greene, and Flannery O'Connor; and composers like John Tavener, Arvo Pärt, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Leonard Bernstein; not to mention the films of

Ingmar Bergman. Consider Bergman, son of a Lutheran pastor, whose work sounds more Stoic than Christian, but who can't seem to escape the absence of God in a troubled life of doubt, suffering, and loss.

Similarly, Bernstein's *Mass* is a profound testament that epitomizes his life-long preoccupation with the God-question: are you there; do you care? In an age when connections between art and religion are often suspect, such inquiries are at least honest, straightforward, and a probing search for what it means to be human. And, insofar as seeing is believing, they are something for Christians to build on.

Our familiarity with the buildings we worship in may make architecture a bit easier to identify as a gift. Yet, although Luther provided an unprecedented reevaluation of liturgy, the reform movement tended to accept the status quo in church buildings. The "Neo" styles, especially Neo-Colonial and Neo-Gothic, maintained their grip, except for a brief dalliance with A-frame structures, right into our own era.

Eero Saarinen, the Finnish American architect, introduced a monumental modernism in Christ Lutheran, Minneapolis, with dramatic sources of light bathing the altar area. Most suggestive for the future, however, is Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel in southern France, the single most important twentieth-century church building. It rejects the straight lines and straight jacket of modernism for pliable, human spaces – to me the most important criterion for modern architecture – and lighted the interior with faceted glass placed serendipitously throughout the building to give a play of color and light, not unlike the original creation.

The jury is still out on Lutheran gifts in architecture, but the promise remains. Ironically, as E. A. Sovik, a Lutheran architect and author, made eminently clear some years ago, Corbusier and Saarinen built magnificent shapes, but these shapes still contain the medieval orientation of back to front. They had not absorbed the liturgical renewal movement that takes seriously how and why the early church worshipped, nor the consequent rediscovery of buildings as houses for a community gathered around Word and sacrament.⁴ Two Lutheran churches in Pennsylvania, Grace in State College and St. Paul in Lititz, did just this. Both are by Walter Waggoner who followed the lead of Corbusier in constructing human spaces, but configured the interiors to reflect the needs of a gathered community.

In all fairness, Jordahl's response, "not much beside Bach," concerned big-time achievements. He would agree that the conclusion might be different if we changed our focus to those smaller, essential units – our congregations – that are at the heart of the Reformation heritage. That the following examples all relate to a single, small place, Gettysburg, should, I hope, illustrate this principle rather than cause a hindrance.

In the visual arts, award-winning poet Katy Giebenhain chairs an arts committee at the seminary that organizes one or more exhibits a year. They have featured outstanding artists, often featured on the cover of this *Review*, who struggle to present religious images

in a modern language and in an atmosphere of doubt and dissatisfaction with tired forms. *Music, Gettysburg!*, a cooperative enterprise between the seminary and the community, led by Mark Oldenburg, offers varied programs throughout the year, including local musicians, internationally-recognized organists, even a large semi-professional orchestra. The *Schola Cantorum*, a mixed-voice choir, founded and directed by Steven Folkemer, features Renaissance and Baroque music in its programs, the highlight of which is an annual Advent Vespers.

One could object that these examples are hardly typical since they arise out of a talent-laden school of theology and not a parish. I venture that there's not as much difference as we might think. My own congregation, St. James in Gettysburg, has its own music programs and displays art works by contemporary artists, including Geoffrey Thulin, son of the late Professor Richard Thulin. An arts committee insures against hanging paint-by-number works meant more for the home than public spaces. Moreover, in the eight years that *Music, Gettysburg! On Tour* has brought its narrators, pianist, and baritone to churches outside Gettysburg, I've been impressed with how many congregations, and not just the mega types, have arts programs which graciously sponsor groups like ours.

Although it was to some degree inspired by the seminary, a last example remains distinctly rooted in congregations of all sizes across a wide spectrum of geography and parish histories. If there is one accomplishment in church culture for which the past generation can take credit, it is the restoration of frequent communion. We may not be able to measure its effect on faith or spirituality, but it should give us some modicum of satisfaction that the Reformation heritage continues to celebrate God's abundant gifts in worship, as well as music and the arts. If our contributions are not prodigious, if we can't point to a twenty-first-century Bach, we can keep the candle burning and light the way through our congregations to the communities we serve.

Notes

- 1 *Luther's Works* (American Edition, 53 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1958-86), vol. 1, pp. 1-82, at p. 11.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
- 3 *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, p. 316.
- 4 Edward A. Sovik, *Architecture for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973).

Gerald Christianson is Emeritus Professor of Church History at United Lutheran Seminary. Most recently, he co-edited and contributed essays to A Companion to the Council of Basel; and, with Leonard Hummel and Barbara Frankel, co-edited Gettysburg: The Quest for Meaning, published by Seminary Ridge Press.

BOOK REVIEWS

Ablass und Reformation – Erstaunliche Kohärenzen¹

Berndt Hamm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016)

Reviewed by Baird Tipson

October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting his 95 theses. What are American Lutherans making of this anniversary? In particular, what did their pastors, who had to step into the pulpit and preach on this 500th "Reformation Sunday," make of it? Too often, I fear, congregations may have ended up enduring another tired sermon about how Luther's "justification by grace through faith" exposed the utter bankruptcy of Catholic "works righteousness."

Those who preach such sermons will be shocked to learn that Berndt Hamm's latest book – which in English would probably be translated *Indulgence and Reformation: Astounding Similarities* – argues that when Luther attacked the indulgence practices of his day, he was simply taking to their logical conclusion the same theological arguments that the indulgence preachers were making. As the late sixteenth-century Jesuit Robert Bellarmine contemptuously declared, no Catholic had ever extended the scope of indulgences as widely as Luther had.²

Hamm, a student of the well-known Reformation scholar Heiko Oberman and probably the pre-eminent German historian of Reformation theology active today, is likely to be known to many readers of this journal for his arguments that Luther's famous "theological breakthrough" occurred not suddenly but over a period of years. Hamm argues that the breakthrough had definitely begun to take shape by the time of the Romans lectures of 1515-16, and that elements of Luther's later positions can be found even earlier.³

In the present book, Hamm turns his attention to the very practice against which Luther raged: the church's eagerness to grant indulgences. The first part of the book leads the reader through a three-and-a-half century development culminating in the great Jubilee-indulgence campaigns of the late 15th and early 16th centuries. These campaigns,

which Hamm compares to the Protestant evangelical revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, had their own celebrity preachers, not only the notorious Johann Tetzel but also Luther's near contemporary in the order of Augustinian hermits, Johannes von Paltz.

Hamm is not primarily interested, however, in simply chronicling the successive papal and conciliar pronouncements that led to the indulgence campaigns. For him, indulgences are the tip of a less visible iceberg. He terms that iceberg *Frömmigkeitstheologie* (literally “theology of piety,” probably best translated as “devotional” or “practical” theology). Hamm contends that for the majority of believers during the 14th, 15th, and very early 16th centuries, *Frömmigkeitstheologie* was Christianity “Simple Christians,” increasingly literate, were demanding more than rote catechetical learning, and prominent academic theologians, following the example of Jean Gerson (1363-1429), developed an “affective theology” to meet their needs. This pastoral theology avoided anything (particularly specialized academic debate) that would interfere with its primary goal: the formation and spiritual deepening of a Christian life. Theology was “democratized” and “domesticated”⁴ – ideally without being dumbed down – and focused on a few central themes. Hamm summarizes these as “a concentration on internalization, prayers of the heart, meditation, lifelong repentance, humility, and imitation of Christ’s suffering,” “a stress on human poverty, weakness, and sinfulness compared to the immensity of divine mercy, which is open even to the greatest sinners and which comes to them through Christ’s incarnation and passion,” and “a strong accent on the soul’s deep communion of love with the humbled and risen Christ, whose saving presence all Christians should experience as a reality for and in themselves.”⁵

In a series of important articles, Hamm has shown how this *Frömmigkeitstheologie* was conveyed not only in vernacular tracts but also in devotional practices, pilgrimages, and single-sheet prints similar in form to those later used so successfully by Luther and Lucas Cranach.⁶ A typical single-sheet print would combine a devotional image – most often of the crucified Jesus – with a vernacular text encouraging the reader to meditate on that image. If the praying reader meditated in the proper devotional frame of mind (*mit Andacht*), she would receive an indulgence. A reader meditating on an image of the wounds of Christ, to give a prominent example, might receive as many days relief from the pains of purgatory as the number of Christ’s wounds: 5,490 by some accounts.⁷

As every student of the Reformation knows, indulgences were intended to wipe out portions of the temporal punishment (*satisfactio*) imposed by one’s confessor at the conclusion of the sacrament of penance. After the confessor had absolved penitents of guilt for the serious sins that had just been confessed, he would require that they demonstrate the sincerity of their sorrow by fasting, giving alms to the poor, reciting prayers at set occasions, and so forth. In extreme cases, one might be asked to refrain from intercourse with one’s spouse for an extended period, go on pilgrimage, or even take part in a crusade.

It was assumed that all but the most pious would die before having completed their accumulated satisfactions, in which case justice would require that the unrequited portion

be burned off in purgatory. Since the pains of purgatory were thought to be almost as agonizing as the pains of hell (scholars call this the “infernalization” of purgatory), purgatorial suffering was something people wanted to avoid or at least minimize. (81) At this point indulgences entered the picture. Our pious Christian, meditating devoutly on Christ’s wounds, could wipe more than 5000 days of pain off the ledger by praying before the image on her single sheet.

Particularly during a period when the mercantile economy was beginning to blossom, Christians were inclined to keep close track of the days, months, and years of indulgence they had accumulated. Might they be able to avoid purgatorial pain altogether? Might they even be able to lessen the pain that their now-dead parents, siblings, and other relatives were even then suffering?

What I have just described might easily be called the conventional Protestant way of imagining indulgences. Hamm turns this on its head. Hamm argues, for example, that the papal Jubilee-indulgence (the one that provoked Luther’s outburst) was an attempt to move Christians away from the practice of keeping a spiritual ledger. Rather than letting believers imagine that their “works” would earn them salvation, indulgence preaching placed all the emphasis on human unworthiness and God’s unmeasurable mercy, more than enough to outweigh any uncompleted satisfaction. It turns out that a Jubilee indulgence cost the average Christian relatively little; Johannes von Paltz, at least, never thought of the indulgence traffic primarily as a money-maker. (90, 129-133)

What was it, then? Hamm is convinced that it was a genuine missionary effort, a grand expression of the tradition of *Frömmigkeitstheologie*. A Jubilee-indulgence offered access to God’s unmeasurable mercy to even the simplest and least confident Christian. (92) The mere decision to avail oneself of that mercy, in this instance by purchasing an indulgence, opened the floodgates so wide that not only the purchaser, not only the purchaser’s relatives and neighbors, but *everyone* could be freed from purgatorial pain. When the campaigns of the Jubilee-indulgence had achieved their goal, purgatory would have been entirely emptied of inhabitants! There needed to be no limit to the efficacy of God’s saving grace; everyone otherwise destined for purgatorial punishment could be reassigned to heaven. (82) Reformers who denied the existence of purgatory altogether, such as Luther and Calvin, were actually just taking the final step in an on-going development. (234)

Space forbids more detailed explanation here, but attentive readers will find more than enough in *Abläss und Reformation*. Suffice to say that it is deeply misleading to characterize indulgence doctrine as “works righteousness.”⁸ Hamm would rather confront his readers with a different question: can one detect any meaningful difference between what Hamm is prepared to call “the Gospel of Indulgence” (*das Evangelium des Ablasses*) and Luther’s Gospel of God’s unconditional forgiveness?

Unlike those of his Lutheran colleagues who now see the Reformation as “a gradual and continuous development” of late medieval thinking,⁹ Hamm does hold out for a fundamental difference, one he recently described at length in an article subsequently

translated for the *Lutheran Quarterly*.¹⁰ Even though Hamm understands that the Reformation could never have occurred without the context of late medieval developments, he still wants to characterize Luther's break from those developments as "revolutionary."¹¹

Building on Augustine's depiction of the Christian's relationship to God, the entire Middle Ages understood that relationship as reciprocal, as a *quid pro quo* (or as Hamm explains it, a *do ut das* [I give to provoke you to give]).¹² To gain divine favor, humans had to take the initiative. No one denied that the human contribution was infinitely less valuable than God's gracious response, but without contributing something, no matter how insignificant, humans could not expect a reciprocal contribution from God. "Ah ha," Lutherans might say, is this not "works righteousness"? No, a medieval thinker would respond, you are taking the notion of "merit," of "earning" God's favor, much too literally. No human work can by its own merit earn anything from God; God is simply willing to accept an otherwise insignificant human effort (what the theologians called "doing your best": *facere quod in se est*) as if it were enough to earn his favor. "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1, NRSV). Yes, one who heard the prophet's call would have to make the decision to come, but nobody would use the verb "earn" to describe the way a hearer could gain access to the feast. In case anyone remained in doubt, the indulgence campaigns made clear how little human effort was expected. *Andacht* did not require that one even feel sorry for one's sins; one might feel no sorrow at all and even subconsciously intend to sin again at the first opportunity. So long, indulgence preachers would say, as you confess that you were sorry that you felt no sorrow (*doleas quod non doleas*), you had "done your best." (138)

All Luther did, explains Hamm, was to take the human contribution from "absolutely minimal" to "nothing."¹³ Where the church up to his time had insisted that God expected some human initiative, insignificant as it might be, some sign of interest, some indication that a person recognized and responded to the enormity of God's redemptive sacrifice on the cross, Luther denied that a person needed do anything at all to provoke God's favor. This cannot be overemphasized, says Hamm. It was revolutionary.

Yet the Jesuit Bellarmine was not wrong to see it as the logical development – albeit to a heretical extreme from his standpoint – of the very emphasis on God's unbounded mercy that had been growing throughout the late Middle Ages and that lay at the heart of the indulgence campaigns. As Lutherans and Catholics pursue their dialogue during the tenure of a more sympathetic Pope, one can hope that the participants keep Hamm's "astounding similarities" in mind as they ponder the meaning of the "Revolution" that was the Reformation.

Notes

- 1 *Nullus umquam tam amplam indulgentiam promulgavit quam Lutherus, Ablass und Reformation*, p. XVIII. Hamm makes Bellarmine's comment the frontispiece of his book, Hereafter, citations to page numbers in *Ablass und Reformation* will appear in parentheses.
- 2 His series of essays in *Der Frühe Luther: Etappen reformatorischer Neuorientierung* (Tübingen, 2010) were published in English translation by Martin J. Lohrmann as *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014).
- 3 "Der 'Demokratisierung' der Scholastik und Mystik zu einer Frömmigkeitstheologie für *simplices*," Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), p. 172; "eine Art von kirchlicher Domestizierung," Hamm, "Was ist Frömmigkeitstheologie: Überlegungen zum 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert," in *Praxis Pietatis: Beiträge zu Theologie und Frömmigkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit. Wolfgang Sommer zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans-Jörg Nieden and Marcel Nieden (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne: W. Kohlhammer, 1999): 9-45, p. 24.
- 4 Hamm, "How Mystical Was Luther's Faith," in Hamm, *The Early Luther*: 190-232, p. 192.
- 5 In English translation see for example: "Types of Grace Mediality in the Late Middle Ages," in Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, eds. *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects, Practices* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2016): 10-35, and "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 307-354.
- 6 Hamm, "Der Weg zum Himmel und die nahe Gnade. Neue Formen der spätmittelalterlichen Frömmigkeit am Beispiel Ulms und des Mediums Einblattdruck," in Ulrike Hascher-Burger, August Den Hollander and Wim Janse, eds. *Between Lay Piety and Academic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 453-496, p. 478.
- 7 As Hamm states his thesis (page 10, my translation), "Correctly understood, the indulgence and in particular the plenary indulgence [he refers to the Jubilee-indulgence] are the authentic Gospel in its complete development. In other words, from the perspective of those committed to them, [indulgences] were the greatest offer of forgiveness of sins possible within the coordinates of late medieval theology, piety, and church authority, a final increase, a maximum of grace and forgiveness of sins. Luther answered with a stunningly different way of esteeming and maximizing divine compassion." [*Der Ablass und insbesondere die Plenarablässe sind, recht verstanden, das wahre Evangelium in seiner vollen Entfaltung; sie sind, anders formuliert, aus der Perspektive der Ablassverehrer das größtmögliche Angebot an Sündenvergebung, das innerhalb der Koordinaten spätmittelalterlicher Theologie, Frömmigkeit und Kirchenautorität möglich war, eine letzte Steigerung, ein Maximum von Gnade und Sündenvergebung, auf das Luther mit einer frippiernden anderen Art der Hochschätzung und Maximierung des göttlichen Erbarmens antwortete.*]
- 8 Hamm distances his argument, for example, from that of Volker Leppin, *Die Wittenberger Reformation und der Prozess der Transformation kultureller zu institutionellen Polaritäten* (Leipzig, 2008). See Hamm, "The Gift of Salvation, Faith, and Action in the Continental Reformation – the Paradigm of Martin Luther," in Dorothea Wendebourg and Alec Ryrie, *Sister Reformations II/Schwesterreformationen II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014): 65-87, p. 92, footnote 14.
- 9 Hamm, "Martin Luther's Revolutionary Theology of Pure Gift without Reciprocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 125-161.
- 10 E.g. the title of the article in the previous footnote.
- 11 Peter Brown's magnificent study of late Roman Christianity, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 A. D.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), here p. 85, describes the early development of the *do ut das* theme. "For late Roman Christians," writes Brown,

“giving took place in the expectation of reward.” “Seldom in any literature,” he continues, “have money and images borrowed from commerce bulked so large as in the literature of late Roman Christianity.”

12 Hamm, “Martin Luther’s Revolutionary Theology of Pure Gift without Reciprocation,” p. 149.

Baird Tipson holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Yale University. As an undergraduate he majored in Religion and History at Princeton University. He also studied at Phillips Universität-Marburg in Germany and has been a Rockefeller Dissertation Fellow, a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and a Fulbright-Hays Fellow. He served as Washington College’s 26th president. Throughout his career in higher education as a teacher, scholar, administrator and fundraiser, he has demonstrated a passion for the liberal arts.

Bonhoeffer’s Reception of Luther

Michael P. DeJonge (Oxford University Press, 2017)

Reviewed by Brian A. Evans

Few pastors or theologians since the modern era can list “attempted tyrannicide” on their curricula vitae. Squaring Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theological thinking with his active and ultimately violent resistance against Hitler and Nazi Germany is a unique task. Michael P. DeJonge recently-released work, *Bonhoeffer’s Reception of Luther*, from Oxford University Press, digs deep to trace Bonhoeffer’s development as a theologian, arguing, unconventionally for English-language volume, that he was a remarkably consistent student of Luther throughout his career. His contributions to the Lutheran tradition were not, as many would argue, a step outside of classical Lutheran thinking but represent, rather, a push to re-ground the church in it.

With the newfound tolerance of white nationalism in the American political sphere, it is natural for the church and for Lutherans in particular to turn to Bonhoeffer for cues on how and when to respond. Calls for a “Muslim ban,” the expulsion of immigrants brought as children, the “dog whistling” against a global Jewish conspiracy: Whether or not the current U.S. administration finds the willingness or competence to follow through on this rhetoric, or if checks on executive powers hold, the new daylighted reality is that the darkness of the human heart hasn’t changed much since 1933 when Bonhoeffer first asked in his essay *The Church and the Jewish Question*, “How does the church judge this action by the state, and what is the church called upon to do about it?”

Though answering these questions in light of current events is not his task, DeJonge succeeds in gifting the reader with a more authentic Bonhoeffer. In avoiding the eisegetical errors of hagiographers who have tried claiming Bonhoeffer for other traditions, (and those of Lutherans who tried pushing him out), DeJonge meticulously develops an image of one who stays firmly within the boundaries of the Lutheran confessions, particularly within Luther’s two-kingdoms thinking.

Furthermore, he shows how Bonhoeffer sought to recover for Lutherans and the church in general something of a backbone – an authoritative voice to speak to the state and, when necessary, a willingness to actively resist. With this tradition long absent from Lutheran discourse, DeJonge shows how we have unnecessarily relied on Reformed and Anabaptist influences

– influences often read into Bonhoeffer himself through the creeping of an invasive two-kingdom’s “doctrine” originating from a rather clumsy treatment by Reinhold Niebuhr. Challenging this inadequate grasp of the two-kingdoms framework, the author takes on

Ernst Troeltsch, the Niebuhr brothers, Clifford Green, (ironically, co-editor with DeJonge of their 2013 *The Bonhoeffer Reader*), Larry Rasmussen, and Stanley Hauweras, adeptly throwing them under the bus and persuading the reader that a twentieth-century dualistic doctrine of the two kingdoms dominating the American theological scene has been thoroughly inadequate, heretical, and counter-productive to the church's ability to proclaim the gospel.

In mapping Bonhoeffer's theological framework, DeJonge first shows how Bonhoeffer, over and against his two most influential contemporaries, Karl Holl and Karl Barth, insists on a Christology marked by two encapsulating statements: "This man is God," and "This is my body." Thus, Christ is at the center of history, as judge and justifier. The church, in proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments, is the presence of Christ, speaking the ultimate into the penultimate. Only the church can interpret the ultimate and speak about it into the current age.

It is the church, the body of Christ, which has possession of the gospel. To the state, however, God gives the sword. In one "project," God is working faith for salvation, and, in another, legal and political power preserves the world for redemption. Christ is Lord of all – the universal means and the goal.

Against particularly American urges that encourage, on one side of the coin, other-worldliness, constructs such as natural law, and orders of creation, and, on the other, social programs and prescriptions, Bonhoeffer, with Luther, calls the church to have *faith* in the coming kingdom rather than work for the purpose of its establishment. The kingdom of God in the penultimate already exists in two ways: order and "miracle," preservation and redemption, restraint and forgiveness of sins, church and state.

Programs and prescriptions, Bonhoeffer argues, are best left to individuals and humanitarian organizations, to which, by their vocation and responsibility, each Christian is certainly called. But the church, speaking corporately as the body of Christ, must not preach salvation through such works, thereby confusing law and gospel. Lest its mission be lost, the church must allow God to work through the state without it seeking to guide every policy and program.

Indeed, this is a look at Bonhoeffer that ought to vex many a mainline American Christian, whether one leans to the left or to the right, (which Luther's own writings on these subjects accomplish in a similar way), but the impulse in every pulpit, synod assembly, and denominational office tower to react to every proposal of legislation, every court ruling, and every presidential tweet with something approaching *status confessionis*, could conceivably make the church look like it is crying wolf and may even confuse its own members about the church's primary function.

The true authority that the church reserves over the state, Bonhoeffer would argue, is far more powerful than these cacophonous cries into the void. Because the church alone is in possession of the gospel, only the church knows the ultimate purpose of the state, which

is to preserve the world toward Christ. Only the church, then, can judge the *character* of the state itself: whether it is wielding *too much* law and order or *too little*. Either form of state actions (or inaction) negatively affect the church's ability to proclaim the gospel, and, in Bonhoeffer's unapologetic Christocentric view, hinder the church from fulfilling its gospel mission.

Specifically, against Nazi policies that would prevent the church from admitting Jews as baptized members, Bonhoeffer believed the universal church was compelled to speak. When it would not speak with one voice, the church was compelled to suffer for its confession of faith. When the church failed to resist nonviolently, Bonhoeffer, according to his understanding of vocation and Christian responsibility, reasoned that the individual was being called to resist violently. Where the church fails to speak as the body of Christ, and where the state threatens God's orders of preservation in a truly apocalyptic sense as Bonhoeffer witnessed, the church, and even the individual, must take up the state's sword. This, DeJonge says, mocking Hauerwas, represents Bonhoeffer's "non-commitment to non-violence."

In this theological system, there are not two separate "realms" but one reality: God ruling in two kingdoms, the church proclaiming the gospel and the state serving the church's purpose. The church keeps its distance but when it does speak against the state, it speaks to power as from the mouth of God. In reaction to the 19th century natural law-based construction, "orders of creation," Bonhoeffer prefers "orders of preservation," a more dynamic presentation, which applies the Law concretely to real situations, rather than through general, timeless principles.

As DeJonge presents him, Bonhoeffer is a devout student of Luther, departing only in nuance from the reformer's teachings – one who looks to a 16th century battle against pope and emperor for inspiration to stand against both *Führer* and a corrupted and colluding church.

Attempting to apply Bonhoeffer's worldview to today's manifestations of racism and bigotry would require the same Christocentrism that many mainline Christians might now see as incompatible with the ideals of pluralism and religious tolerance. On the other hand, in a framework where all orders are understood as preserving the world for Christ, no one is an outsider to God's ultimate purpose. Bigotry and racism of every kind are enemies of Christ. Nationalism and its idol kings stand against the kingdom of God. And, in certain circumstances, faith in and obedience to Christ might even demand laying down one's life – not only for friend and neighbor – but for the alien and stranger alike.

Brian A. Evans is Senior Pastor at First Lutheran Church in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He holds degrees from Thiel College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (M.Div.).

Curious about theology and the arts?

A reflective, academic journal for scholars and lay readers.



ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies is an academic journal that explores the interrelationships among theology, spirituality, and the arts. Published for more than 25 years, *ARTS* is ecumenical and interreligious. We focus on visual arts and poetry, with frequent articles on music and other artistic media, as well.

ARTS publishes two issues in print and online annually.

Visit us online at
<http://www.societyarts.org/arts-journal>
for more information!

United
Lutheran
Seminary
Urban Theological Institute



**PREACHING
WITH POWER 2018**

The 36th annual Forum on Black Preaching and Theology is March 11-15, 2018. Join us at congregations in Philadelphia and on United Lutheran Seminary's Mt. Airy campus. www.UnitedLutheranSeminary.edu/uti

seminaryexplores.uls.edu



(((The Seminary Explores)))
PODCAST



"A New View on the Civil War's Great Battle"

111 Seminary Ridge | Gettysburg, PA 17325
www.seminaryridgemuseum.org
 717-339-1300 | Group tickets: 717-339-1354



**SEMINARY
RIDGE
MUSEUM**
GETTYSBURG



Albin Hillert

Photography - Text - Communication

www.albinhillert.com

Based in Stockholm, Sweden Available worldwide
