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*Editor: The Rev. Dr. Brooks Schramm* bschramm@Ltsg.edu  
*Managing Editor: The Rev. John Spangler* jspangler@Ltsg.edu  
*Book Review Editor: The Rev. Dr. Maria Erling* merling@Ltsg.edu  
*Design & Production: Katy Giebenhain* kgiebenhain@Ltsg.edu

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# SEMINARY RIDGE REVIEW

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# The Holy Spirit and Lutheran Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century

*Karin Johannesson*

What constructive suggestions and critical comments concerning activities that people today appreciate and portray as spiritual exercises can we contribute from within a Lutheran tradition? Are there reminders that are mainly our duty to articulate, since we pass on a tradition marked by a fundamental rejection of everything that might turn out to be self-righteousness? Additionally, can we be something else or something more than skeptical towards today's growing interest in spiritual training? Is it even possible for us to engage in and invite people to such activities without jeopardizing our own theological framework? Such issues are crucial, I believe, to all of us who seek to cultivate Christian faith as understood by Lutheran traditions in the hope that our religious outlook will be a live and existentially adequate option for people today as well as for future generations. Certain transitions characterizing our Western societies today make those questions urgent.

## *The Subjective Turn and the Growing Interest in Spirituality*

Today, it is quite trendy to be interested in matters vaguely referred to as "spirituality." Different kinds of meditation, yoga, silent days, retreats and pilgrimages exemplify activities or practices that a number of people portray as spiritual training. They assume that we, in some sense, can grow or mature spiritually by undertaking such activities, since they contribute to our human flourishing by putting us in touch with something divine.

Sociologists of religion, among others, try to distinguish what characterizes this growing interest in spirituality. The British scholars Paul Heelas

and Linda Woodhead depict it as associated with what they, inspired by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, understand as a “massive subjective turn of modern culture.” This turn is an alteration in our primary “sources of significance” and, according to some scholars, it is the defining cultural development modelling present-day western societies. It implies that the subjectivities of each individual become a unique source, perhaps the decisive source, of significance, meaning, and authority.<sup>1</sup> The key conviction is that we humans mainly discover truth and goodness by going inwards, trusting and exploring our own feelings, intuitions, passions, dreams and experiences.

Within the field of religion, the subjective turn manifests itself as “a spiritual turn,” that is, as a growing interest in religious beliefs and practices that emphasize the cultivation or sacralization of every individual’s unique inner life. The Swedish scholars Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh and Per Pettersson sum up this transformation with the statement that God, the divine, is in the process of “moving inside human beings.” God or the divine reality is more frequently conceptualized as something within each person rather than something out there, and religion or spirituality tend to be linked with ideas about how we can realize our full potential as human beings, how we can find harmony and health and grow into mature personalities.<sup>2</sup>

Some argue that we today, due to this spiritual turn, are witnessing a tectonic shift in the sacred landscape that will prove even more significant than the Protestant Reformation.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of whether one thinks that this is an exaggeration or not, Kirsi Stjerna correctly reminds us that “the situation compels Lutherans to react as a plethora of non-Christian or non-Lutheran spiritualities are being embraced by people hungry for spiritual direction or ‘identity.’ Lutherans need to define what ‘Lutheran spirituality’ might be and what unique meaning it has to offer people today.”<sup>4</sup>

Stjerna underlines that “[t]he Reformation was about reformation of spirituality, reformation of practices of piety, reformation of tools that sustain spiritual living.”<sup>5</sup> Still, it is not obvious how we Lutherans might respond to today’s spiritual turn. “In contemporary Protestant contexts, there is a considerable ambiguity around the word spirituality.”<sup>6</sup> Some scholars emphasize that Luther’s theology is a theology of the heart, that is, a theology that stresses the importance of subjective life. For example, the Swedish professor Birgit Stolt articulates this line of reasoning when she claims that “Luther’s experience-based spirituality may be one of the most relevant dimensions of his word to us today.” Stolt reminds us that sociologists call “the society that we live in an ... experience-based society ... [since m]ore and more people today long for a deeply felt and ‘lived’ spirituality,

instead of a theoretical religion.” In the same vein as the late professor Bengt Hoffman, Stolt asserts that Luther “has much to teach us about the whole-hearted passion for God and life, for heart-felt love and joy.”<sup>7</sup>

However, a combined interest in Luther and subjective life appears odd to others. As the Norwegian professor Jan-Olav Henriksen points out, “[i]n a great deal of Protestant theology we find a deep skepticism towards subjective life, guided by the notion that these elements are marked by sin and should be met with suspicion.”<sup>8</sup> This Protestant skepticism is associated with Martin Luther’s teachings on justification by grace through faith alone as spelled out in *On the Bondage of the Will*. In that work, Luther emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit alone that awakens our faith and promotes our growth in faith. The notion that we, somehow, can contribute in this process is portrayed as a dangerous delusion that is associated with our human, sinful tendency to become curved inward on ourselves.

Lutheran theologians, as well as others, still have the responsibility to alert us to this life-threatening tendency. Today, as well as in Luther’s time, spiritual training activities sometimes promote an unsound self-centeredness, an arrogant pride and a patronizing attitude towards others. However, the fact that this is sometimes the case must not induce us to believe that Luther completely renounced every activity that we can portray as spiritual training. The Finnish scholar Olli-Pekka Vainio underscores that if the outcome of our reconstruction of Luther’s theology is the deconstruction of Christian spirituality, then we have come a long way from Luther’s original intentions.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, some interpretations of Luther’s theology encourage a “spiritual laxity,” according to Vainio, “produced by the fear of self-righteousness. If all my deeds are totally sinful, even spirituality (praying, reading the Scripture, singing, praise, charity, and so forth) is tainted with evil desires that spoil these practices.”<sup>10</sup>

My aim in this article is to highlight three different expositions of Luther’s theology that do not result in the deconstruction but rather the promotion of Christian spirituality, since they end up in the conclusion that certain activities stand out as sound spiritual training also in light of Luther’s explication of Christian faith. The fact that we can encourage some kinds of spiritual training without jeopardizing the central core of Luther’s theology is glad tidings in light of today’s growing interest in spirituality. It implies that we can portray Luther as a spiritual teacher who still stands tall and our Lutheran tradition as a rewarding context of discovery.

My approach is inspired by a critical line of reasoning that Martin Luther develops in the treatise *On the Councils and the Church*. Responding to the antinomians, Luther observes that they may be fine Easter-preachers; however, they are very poor Pentecostal-preachers, for they do not preach

about the sanctification of the Holy Spirit but solely about the forgiveness of sin. But Jesus Christ, Luther reminds us, has purchased redemption from sin and death so that the Holy Spirit might transform us into new beings, beginning and growing here on earth and attaining fulfilment in the world to come.<sup>11</sup>

I think Luther's criticism is well worth considering also within present-day Lutheran traditions, since we Lutherans tend to be better Easter-preachers than Pentecostal-preachers and this is a pity, especially in a time when spirituality is in vogue. Our talk about the Holy Spirit is not as advanced or well-used as our teachings about redemption. Thus there is a need for reflection, renewal and reformation. I will contribute to the endeavor to find promising Lutheran approaches in a cultural setting marked by a widespread interest in spirituality and spiritual training by highlighting the work done by the Finnish professor Tuomo Mannermaa (1937-2015), the Swedish professor and bishop Arvid Runestam (1887-1962) and the German professor Rudolf Hermann (1887-1962). My choice of dialogue partners is due to the fact that it is possible to conceptualize certain actions as promoting the work of the Holy Spirit and the believer's holiness in light of their different Luther interpretations. In addition, Mannermaa, Runestam, and Hermann remind us of certain risks that I believe we Lutherans have a duty to keep in mind and help people manage. I will begin with Mannermaa's explication of Luther's theology, since his work is most widely discussed today.

### *Tuomo Mannermaa*

According to Mannermaa, the leading idea in Luther's theology is his insistence on Christ's presence in faith.<sup>12</sup> By stressing Luther's notion of Christ as a "gift" (*donum*) and not just a "favor" (*favor*), Mannermaa emphasizes that Luther believes that Christ, that is his entire person and work, is really present in the believer.<sup>13</sup> Christ is not only God's favor, that is, forgiveness of sins, but also God's "gift," that is, God himself present within the Christian. Since Christ is a divine person, the notion of Christ as a "gift" means that the believer becomes a participant in the divine nature and the divine life. This participation, in turn, is characterized by Mannermaa as a mystical union that brings forth the believer's continuous transformation into the likeness of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Mannermaa maintains that Christ's presence in faith, according to Luther, implies that the Christian believer has a spiritual existence (*esse gratiae*) that is absolutely real.<sup>15</sup> Faith establishes what Mannermaa portrays as a "real-ontic" unity between Christ and the Christian.<sup>16</sup> Consequently,

according to Mannermaa's Luther interpretation, God changes the human being ontologically by making her righteous. This means that faith not only is an existential relation to something that stays outside the believer but also a relation that causes a spiritual being and spiritual action to be received *inside* the believer as a new spiritual reality.<sup>17</sup> Luther regards the Spirit as a distinct subject or agent in the believer, present in the Christian as a kind of "other" reality.<sup>18</sup> Through Christ's presence, the believer becomes all that anyone is and ever can be spiritually.<sup>19</sup>

In light of this key claim, Mannermaa argues that Luther, contrary to later Lutheranism, gives equal emphasis to the "forensic" and the "effective" aspects of justification. This implies that justification and sanctification, rather than being two distinct matters, are intertwined with each other and come about simultaneously. Consequently, the doctrine of justification and notions about sanctification constitute one whole in Luther's theology. Christ as united with the Christian is simultaneously the imputed, alien righteousness that justifies the believer by protecting her against the wrath of God and a transforming and reforming gift that renews the believer by making her righteous.<sup>20</sup> This conjunction implies that the idea of progress is included in the basic concept of faith itself, since the presence of Christ in faith means the beginning of a real transformation.<sup>21</sup> Thus Mannermaa's explication of Luther's theology brings to the forefront the issue of whether we humans can somehow contribute to our own spiritual growth. Can we do something, and, in that case, what can we do in order to foster our own maturation as Christians?

Mannermaa spells out his approach to this issue in discussing Luther's distinction between God's proper work and God's alien work. God's proper work is the believer's divinization. However, God does not carry out this proper work directly by granting the believer an obvious, increasing holiness. Instead, God accomplishes this progress indirectly, through God's alien work, that is, through happenings that destroy our human tendency to trust in ourselves. Such experiences reveal our incapacity to contribute to our own spiritual well-being, and, consequently, they disclose our dependence on God, thus making us receptive towards God's gifts (*capax Dei*).<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, Mannermaa underscores that in most cases the believer's divinization or sanctification is an invisible process that Luther confidently assumes is in progress even if there are no signs indicating this.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he emphasizes that the modus of a Christian, according to Luther, is always marked by passivity. We humans are neither inwardly nor outwardly active in the process of receiving God's gifts.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Mannermaa's line of reasoning seems to culminate in the conclusion that we Christian's

cannot identify any activities as contributing to or facilitating God's proper work, that is, the human being's divinization. However, the fundamental importance that Mannermaa attributes to the real-ontic union between Christ and the Christian implies that we indisputably can distinguish the use of the sacraments as spiritual training, since they establish or re-establish the real-ontic unity between Christ and the Christian and, consequently, sustain the believer's spiritual existence and transformation into the likeness of Christ. Thus, in the end, Mannermaa's much discussed Luther interpretation ends up in a quite uncontroversial answer to the question of what, if anything, we humans can do in order to interact with the Holy Spirit and assist her in her mission to reform us and the world. We can be baptized, and we can celebrate the Eucharist. Beyond this, we trust that the Holy Spirit is doing her job behind the scenes.

### *Arvid Runestam*

If Arvid Runestam had gotten the chance to discuss the conception of spiritual training inherent in Mannermaa's work, he would have indicated that there are other actions in addition to the use of the sacraments that can be characterized as sound spiritual training. Runestam explicitly claims that we can conceptualize certain actions as means of grace contributing to the doer's holiness or sanctification, that is, as spiritual training. Furthermore, he argues that it is important that we make use of this possibility, since the Lutheran tendency to neglect the potential within asceticism, which is the term Runestam uses, has negative impact. It implies that we do not reach our full potential as Christians or, to put it in another way, that God's will is not done at times when it could have been done.

As with many Luther scholars of his time, Runestam begins his work by identifying the freedom of a Christian as the core content of Luther's theology. He emphasizes that Luther depicts the freedom of a Christian as twofold. Firstly, the Christian believer is religiously free. She is free from the law, from sin, and from the belief that justification depends on her own actions, and, consequently, she is liberated for the true worship of and communion with God. Secondly, the Christian is morally free. This moral freedom springs forth from the believer's religious freedom, and it consists of her happy willingness and strength to do good deeds spontaneously. The religious as well as the moral freedom of a Christian is, according to Runestam, associated with a certain liberty that Luther did not discuss but which is of vital importance to present-day people, namely, our psychological freedom, our experience of being a self that is involved in its own actions because she has freedom of choice.

Runestam wrestles with the question of whether our psychological freedom is only a chimera, according to Luther. His conclusion is that we can be truthful to Luther and at the same time ascribe a genuine psychological freedom to the human being. Runestam supports this conclusion by arguing that Luther understands the evil free will of human beings who are turned away from God as their self, their identity. Correspondingly, he understands the free will of the Christian as her self, her identity. Runestam refers to the Christian believer's self as her spiritual self, and he portrays the psychological freedom that he associates with the believer's spiritual self as the freedom to act without, or in order to overcome, selfish motives. This freedom to act without or against selfish intentions is the psychological freedom of the Christian, and its implementation is the aim of the spiritual training that Runestam recommends.<sup>28</sup> When a Christian believer with increasing frequency acts on her psychological freedom, she progressively realizes her true personality, that is, her spiritual self.

Runestam claims that Luther sometimes portrays the believer's spiritual self as a religious self, that is, as a subject who trusts in God's forgiving grace; on other occasions he portrays it as a moral self, that is, as a subject who reveals the happy willingness to do good deeds. His approving attitude towards spiritual training is linked to this duality, since it rests on a certain explication of the relationship between faith and good works. Runestam argues that Luther portrays this relationship as so intimate that we have to understand it as reciprocal. This reciprocity implies that faith not only results in good works. The opposite is also true; good works can result in faith, since people can gain, regain, or grow in faith due to their actions. Thus my actions have the potential to be means of grace not only to others but also to myself, since my doings can produce faith in my heart even if they did not spontaneously emerge out of faith. For example, if I spontaneously want to say something mean to my colleague, but refrain from doing that because I believe that it is against God's will, my silence creates a new reality within me, since it implies that the sinfulness in my heart is conquered by faith.<sup>30</sup>

The significance of spiritual training can be spelled out in light of the conversion taking place when the lack of faith in my heart is conquered by faith through my actions. Runestam portrays this shift as the gospel's conquest of areas that were formerly governed by the law. Runestam continually uses the concept of law in a very broad sense. Law is everything whatsoever that promotes hopelessness and despair by fostering reliance upon oneself instead of God. For instance, the ambition to build a career as well as present-day beauty ideals can be part of the law, at least to some of us. Runestam repeatedly reminds us that it is God's will to liberate us from the law, no matter what, more precisely, it includes.



Since the exact content of the law and, consequently, of the liberating gospel can vary between different periods and different persons, Runestam reminds us that there is a need for skilful theologians, that is, theologians who know how to set law and gospel apart in a specific situation. If we are to engage in or invite people to spiritual training activities, we have to design and undertake those activities in ways that are liberating to the participants, since well-functioning spiritual training activities proclaim the gospel, not the law, according to Runestam. The gospel, in turn, can permeate a believer's life to a greater or a lesser extent. In other words, the gospel can conquer a larger or a smaller part of the reign of the law. Spiritual exercises might further this conquest and thus promote the freedom of a Christian, according to Runestam. Thus Runestam portrays Luther's understanding of the believer's sanctification or holiness as a certain extension of the freedom of a Christian. This expansion implies that the Holy Spirit increasingly liberates the believer from the law that binds her, including her self-centeredness. As a result, the believer will spontaneously act in accordance with God's will in further situations.

The chief merit of Runestam's work is that it contains a clear criterion that we can use in order to identify sound spiritual training. This criterion states that a certain action is a means of grace to the doer if it helps her to keep her relationship with God open, revives her spiritual life and confidence, and leads her back into a position of faith, that is, if it proclaims the gospel to her in a way that concerns her personally. Any action that fulfills this criterion is a sound spiritual exercise; be it a visit to an elderly relative, a jogging tour, or an hour of meditation. However, so called "spiritual exercises" that do not fulfill this function are immensely dangerous, since they jeopardize faith, that is, trust in God in opposition to trust in oneself. Against the background of his demarcation of sound spiritual training, Runestam issues warnings against spiritual exercises that foster a cult of the individual, a quest for harmony for its own sake, or a curved-in obsession with one's own inner experiences or feelings.

Rudolf Hermann, in turn, articulates additional warnings, partly in the vein of Runestam but partly in opposition to his explication of Luther's theology. At times, Hermann puts certain aspects of Runestam's work as well as certain aspects of Mannermaa's work into question. Therefore, his work provides further food for thought.

### *Rudolf Hermann*

Hermann's explication of Luther's views on holiness is based on a certain philosophical position that he began to elaborate in the mid-1920's. The

German professor Heinrich Assel depicts Hermann's intellectual development as marked by a linguistic turn that has much in common with Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Wittgenstein investigates different language-games which, according to him, establish different realities. In the same vein, Hermann realizes that our language creates our reality. This is also true in the case of religious faith. Consequently, Hermann assumes that there are fundamental statements that are linked to and bring about the reality of justification. He deems it to be the theologian's job to identify and explicate those statements and to preserve and pass on the knowledge of how to use them. By doing this, the theologian conveys the reality of justification to people today and to future generations by maintaining indispensable language skills.

After several years of work, Hermann concludes that there are three statements that govern the language-game conveying the reality of justification. These statements can be expressed in different ways, that is, the same propositional content can be articulated by means of various utterances. Consequently, there is a continuous need for pastoral theological reflections, examining how those fundamental statements are to be communicated in a certain congregational setting in order to convey successfully the reality of justification to those people that together make up this particular parish.

In order to appreciate the fundamental statements that Hermann identifies, we need to know that he assumes that God is in dialogue with every human being since her moment of birth. This dialogue begins when God calls a human being into existence, and it evolves as the human being becomes increasingly aware of this life-giving dialogue and continually responds by contributing her own lines. Hermann uses the word "prayer" as an umbrella term referring to this dialogue, and he depicts the development that occurs when a human being more and more consciously relates to God as a progress in the history of her self.<sup>39</sup> Gradually, the human being becomes a person, that is, a responsible and liberated subject.

The first fundamental statement governing the language game that conveys the reality of justification expresses the insight that my life depends on someone else. Hermann formulates this statement as the proposition, "I am my time". This proposition verbalizes the knowledge that if I did not have a life-time, I would not exist. Furthermore, it articulates the awareness that the beginning as well as the end of my life-time is, in most cases, not up to me to decide. When I realize this, I take a first step towards recognizing God as the source and aim of life.<sup>40</sup>

The second basic assertion that Hermann identifies voices the insight that what I do with my time, that is, what I do during my life-time, creates my self. Hermann expresses this statement using the words, "My action is

my becoming.”<sup>41</sup> When I realize that I do not always do what I ought to do, I identify myself as a sinner. When this recognition results in a prayer for forgiveness, marked by trust in God’s promises as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, I endorse the third fundamental statement governing the language game that transfers the reality of justification, namely, the statement that “I am simultaneously righteous and a sinner”. This basic assertion articulates the discovery that God immediately meets every prayer for forgiveness by granting the praying person Christ’s righteousness. Furthermore, it reveals that the praying human being’s gradual development into a responsible and liberated person culminates in her recognition of herself as simultaneously righteous and a sinner. When a human being’s dialogue with God comprises all three basic assertions, it evolves into a genuine and redemptive communication. Then the dialogue conveys the reality of justification.<sup>42</sup> Hermann explains that this implies that the praying person is incorporated into another time, in addition to the earthly time that we depict as her lifespan. Since her time is her being and becoming, this entails that she receives another self. When she acts on the basis of this new self, she is playing her role in God’s salvation plan for the world, perhaps without realizing this herself.<sup>43</sup>

We refer to this new time as eternity. It is God’s time, accessible already now, thanks to Jesus Christ, and, in the world to come, it is the only time that will remain.<sup>44</sup> In this divine time, the believer’s righteousness is already fully at hand. In that sense, she is already 100% holy. However, if we consider the believer from our earthly time perspective, we can depict her sanctification as a cumulative process consisting in her trusting conversation with Jesus in still further moments. One could say that this process implies that the reality of justification is stretched out in the believer’s life by increasingly permeating her existence in earthy time.<sup>45</sup> The German scholar Reinhard Vollmer claims that this means that we can benefit from Hermann’s work if we develop what Vollmer thinks is greatly needed in our time, namely, a Lutheran spirituality. In the light of Hermann’s work, we can portray a particular Christian *carpe diem*, a certain seizing of the day or of the moment, as spiritual training contributing to the believer’s holiness.<sup>46</sup> This seizing is the believer’s conversation with Christ in prayer, that is, her continuous linking of her life to Christ’s life and her awareness that she is living her life before his eyes. As a result, promoting spiritual training implies teaching other people and learning from other people how to maintain such a dialogue as the one that Hermann portrays as conveying the reality of justification. Since this reality is associated with a certain use of language, spiritual training is basically about language acquisition.<sup>47</sup>

This possibility of setting a certain activity apart as sound spiritual training is quite surprising, since Hermann himself is very skeptical towards what he terms “evangelical exercises of piety”.<sup>48</sup> The reason for his skepticism is that he holds that spiritual training activities all too often cause an incorrect explication of Luther’s views on holiness or sanctification, namely, the misunderstanding that Luther uses “sanctification” as a quantity-concept (*ein Massbegriff*). To grow in faith or in righteousness is not, according to Luther, to acquire something that can be likened to a greater spiritual muscle mass. Instead, Hermann argues, Luther understands “sanctification” as a time-concept (*ein Zeitbegriff*) in the way that I have explained; that is, as an incorporation into eternity that can be conceptualized as a Christian *carpe diem*.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, Luther repudiates the idea that sanctification entails that the believer becomes less of a sinner. Instead, sanctification implies that the believer, in addition to being 100% sinner, becomes 100% righteous in still further moments.

### *Promising Approaches and Reminders*

At the beginning of this article, I posed the question whether it is possible for us Lutherans to engage in and invite people to spiritual training activities without jeopardizing our own theological framework. The good tidings inherent in the work of Rudolf Hermann as well as in the work of Tuomo Mannermaa and Arvid Runestam is that we Lutherans can conceptualize certain activities as promoting the work of the Holy Spirit and the believer’s holiness without putting the core content of Luther’s theology at risk. Consequently, inspired by their work, we can elaborate promising Lutheran approaches that can guide and inspire people in a cultural setting marked by a widespread interest in spirituality. Mannermaa, Runestam, and Hermann encourage us to track down and unfold our talk about the Holy Spirit in order to become more skillful Pentecostal preachers. In addition, they assist us in articulating certain reminders that I believe Lutheran theologians, in particular, have a duty to express and pass on. Those reminders pinpoint important hallmarks characterizing Lutheran spirituality, if Lutheran spirituality is defined as undertakings inspired by the Holy Spirit, promoting her influence in our lives and the world.

Drawing on the work of Rudolf Hermann, we can emphasize that a certain linguistic setting, consisting of God’s Word and our response, is essential to our spiritual life. In this linguistic setting, the human being’s prayer for forgiveness, based on her trust in Christ, is of central importance, since this particular verbal exchange conveys the reality of justification.



Consequently, if we want to promote the Holy Spirit's influence, we have to assist people in uttering this key statement in their ongoing dialogue with God. Today, this might require a reformation of our talk about sin, since people might find it difficult to make our traditional words their own. Even if such an interpretative work, as well as the more wide-ranging effort to incorporate still more people in the language-game that Hermann depicts as the reign of the Holy Spirit, is quite extensive, Hermann encourages us to tackle the task with vigor.

In addition, Hermann reminds us that there are certain risks involved if we combine spiritual training with a too extensive silence. In that case, the misunderstanding that our doings might result in something that can be likened to a greater spiritual muscle mass is close at hand, since this is how most of us spontaneously understand spiritual training. We tend to think that spiritual training resembles physical exercises such as weight lifting. Consequently, Hermann calls for an explicit and more comprehensive Lutheran explication of what we are doing when we, led by the Holy Spirit, act in order to promote her influence in our lives and in the world.

Arvid Runestam agreed to this request. Falling back on his work, we can conceptualize every action that helps the doer to keep her relationship with God open, revives her spiritual life and confidence, and leads her back into a position of faith as spiritual training. Runestam thereby pinpoints another hallmark characterizing Lutheran spirituality, namely, its focus on everyday life. Not only established spiritual exercises such as pilgrimages or meditation can fulfill the function of contributing to the believer's holiness; also ordinary undertakings such as spending time with one's children or washing the car can be conceptualized as means of grace supporting the doer's faith and that core identity that Runestam refers to as the believer's spiritual self. This implies that everyday duties, in addition to being understood as outcomes of the Holy Spirit's influence on us, can also be conceptualized as spiritual training contributing to her continued impact on us. Consequently, Runestam refines the widespread assumption that we have to do something additional, over and above what we do at a daily basis, if we want to engage in spiritual training.

Finally, by making use of the work of Tuomo Mannermaa, we can pinpoint still another hallmark characterizing Lutheran spirituality, namely, its sacramental setting. Today, there is a tendency to conceptualize spiritual training as a private project, aiming at the individual's personal development. Mannermaa challenges this view when he reminds us that we receive the Holy Spirit in the community of believers, that is, in the Church, through the sacraments. The Holy Spirit can speak to us in very different ways and settings. However, we confess that she certainly is present

and active in baptism and the Eucharist. In light of this, spiritual training that has no connection whatsoever with the sacramental life of the church is quite incomprehensible to us Lutherans. As the Danish Luther scholar Regin Prenter emphasizes in an influential study from which Mannermaa took inspiration, life in the Spirit is always an ecclesial existence, according to Luther.

Today, we are witnessing a shift in the sacred landscape that can be characterized as a spiritual turn. By drawing on Mannermaa's, Runestam's and Hermann's work, we can explore and discuss how we Lutherans can conceptualize spiritual training without jeopardizing our own theological outlook. In light of their work, we can identify certain activities as spiritual training, that is, as facilitating the work of the Holy Spirit. Also, we can identify and articulate certain reminders that need to be verbalized in a time when God, the divine, is in the process of moving inside human beings. Thus we can portray Luther as a spiritual teacher who still stands tall and our Lutheran tradition as a rewarding context of discovery.

### Notes

- 1 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005) 2-5.
- 2 Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh Beckman, and Per Pettersson, *Religious Change in Northern Europe: The Case of Sweden* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2004) 101.
- 3 Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 2.
- 4 Kirsi Stjerna, "Luther, Lutherans, and Spirituality," in *Spirituality: Toward a 21st Century Lutheran Understanding* (ed. Kirsi Stjerna and Brooks Schramm; Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2004) 32-49.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 6.
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*Karin Johannesson is Associate Professor (Docent) in Philosophy of Religion at the Faculty of Theology in Uppsala and a pastor in the Church of Sweden. She earned her Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Uppsala in 2002. Her doctoral thesis, God pro Nobis: On Non-Metaphysical Realism and the Philosophy of Religion, was published in English by Peeters in 2007. More recently, she has been involved in a research project about Lutheran theology and ethics in a Post-Christian Society.*

## Spirit and Letter, Gospel and Law: Augustine and Luther in Conversation

*Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth*

*Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us: our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:4-6 NRSV)*

This passage from 2 Corinthians is the foundation of Augustine's response to the Pelagian controversy, which he titled *De spiritu et littera* (*Concerning the Spirit and the Letter*). Quoting Paul, the African Doctor insists that our competence, our value, our righteousness comes from God; trying to obey the letter of the law will only bring death, yet a relationship with the Spirit will allow us to live. More than a millennium later, the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, who had found this same message in several passages in Romans (especially 1:17 and the whole of chap. 3), was relieved to read Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* and find that these anti-Pelagian views, while rarely preached or taught, were still safely within catholic Christian tradition. The young pre-Reformation Luther, in 1515, joyfully having found the gate of Paradise opened to him, was grateful to know the Doctor of Grace and the most authoritative father of the church was also holding open the door of orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> Their mutual understanding of this passage as the key to understanding justification and the ways that their understanding of justification relate to twenty-first-century questions of lived human experience is the subject of this paper.

### *On Letter and Spirit in Reading Scripture*

To begin, it is of no small importance to note that both Augustine and Luther come to their understanding of justification by reading the letter of Scripture. In the early fifth century, Augustine who had taken *tolle, lege* ("take up, and read") literally as a young Christian convert, wages against Pelagius *sola scriptura*. Interestingly, when Luther does likewise in the sixteenth century, there are many in the Roman church that argue that this Scriptural approach is wrong-headed. Emser, that goat of Leipzig, uses, ironically, Scripture in order to denounce Luther's insistence of *sola Scriptura*. Emser proclaims that the phrase "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" forbids using the letter of Scripture to refute the tradition of the church. Scripture forbids that one take Scripture literally, according to Emser. Emser claims that Paul proclaims Scripture should be read, not literally, but only through the spiritual lens – a lens conveniently provided by the Roman Catholic Church and its tradition.<sup>2</sup> Individuals must not, in Emser's view, arrogantly expect that they have the competence to read and understand Scripture as such competence comes from God who works through the tradition and the Roman Catholic Church. Emser continues to suggest that Luther is a biblical literalist in the worst sense of the word, unable to recognize metaphors, analogies, and figures of speech in the text.

Yet, Luther's response shows his own prowess with figures of speech. Writing as only Luther can: "How nicely Emser harmonizes with St. Paul, just like the ass with the nightingale."<sup>3</sup> Luther, like Augustine before him, a master of rhetorical skill, knows well how to use and read language. Luther demonstrates his knowledge of the rules of language by explaining metaphors to Emser. "For example," says Luther, "if I said, 'Emser is a crude ass,' and a simple man following the words understood Emser to be a real ass with long ears and four feet, he would be deceived by the letter, since through such veiled words I wanted to indicate that he had a crude and unreasonable mind."<sup>4</sup> Luther explains to Emser that such figures are, of course, in Scripture too.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen in passages when Jesus calls certain people "a brood of vipers" (Luke 3:7) or tells others that they are "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13-14). It is worth noting that Luther in his lectures on Genesis is consistent on this point, arguing that the text should be read literally, not allegorically, but that one should not mistake the poetic terms for scientific thesis. For example, when Moses calls the moon a lamp, he does not mean that we must ignore the testimony of astronomers and believe that the moon gives its own light, but only that the moon functions like a lamp for us.<sup>6</sup>

Generally Luther knows his own prowess with exegesis and finds Emser ridiculous when he proclaims that Luther does not understand how to read Scripture.

Thus it is quite obvious that Emser fails miserably here and knows less about Scripture than a child.... Moreover, his erroneous and false understanding leads to the humiliation of all of Scripture as well as to his own great disgrace. For the diligence and efforts of all teachers are directed solely to discovering the literal meaning which alone is valid for them too. Thus Augustine also writes that “figures prove nothing”.<sup>7</sup>

Luther points out that the teachers of the tradition insist on the necessity of reading the letter of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Here is the first important point, Luther insists, as Augustine insisted, on the literal reading of Scripture, although the word “literal” might not be quite the right word. “Those who call it ‘grammatical, historical meaning’ do better. It would be appropriate to call it the ‘meaning of the tongue or of language.’”<sup>9</sup> Luther certainly reads only through the lens of Christ, thus using a historical-Christological method, but Luther demands that we read Scripture in a different way than we read poetry like that of Virgil.<sup>10</sup> Augustine was, also, clear that while Virgil thrilled him as a child and the books of the Platonists led him out of nihilism, only Scripture offered him Christ.<sup>11</sup>

The irony in Emser’s use of 2 Corinthians to condemn Luther’s reading of Scripture is that Emser completely misunderstands the point and context of these two verses from Paul. This passage is not about how to read Scripture at all. Luther is clear that Emser’s difficulty is not because 2 Corinthians is a difficult text; the message is not hidden or esoteric. Luther and Augustine both find it clear from the context that Paul is speaking about the literal application of the law and the spiritual freedom that is given by God. Luther and Augustine understand this because they are looking at Scripture as a whole, not just trying to use bits of it to justify a tradition of the church. Luther is clear, to understand Scripture we only have to read it. Scripture is not obscure. But we do actually need to read it. We have to take Scripture seriously, if we are to come to understanding and faith.

It is particularly ironic that Emser uses this passage from 2 Corinthians against Luther who is using Scripture to debate the legitimacy of the hierarchy of the church as the means of grace. Indeed, this very passage is actually a cornerstone in cementing Luther’s understanding of justification by faith not works. Luther explains to Emser that he is happy that this is the verse in question, for “in this matter I shall teach you better (to speak without boasting) than you have ever been taught by any other teacher, with the

exception of St. Augustine – if you have read his *On the Spirit and the Letter*.<sup>12</sup>

### *Spirit and Letter, Gospel and Law: Augustine and Luther on Justification*

The meaning of 2 Cor 3:4-6 is very clear to Luther and to Augustine before him. This is the heart of the Reformation, and practically hackneyed to us Lutherans nearly 500 years later. If we are competent, our competence comes from God not from ourselves. If we try to master the letter of the law by our own competence, we will die. But if the Spirit aids us we are given life. Life is only possible through a gift of the Spirit. But banal as we Lutherans today may find it, this passage and similar ones in Romans and Galatians were shocking to the young Luther, and revolutionary to those to whom he preached.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” (Rom 1:16-17 NRSV)*

Luther found his entire life re-oriented by this passage during his famous Tower Experience. As a monk he had been trying to achieve righteousness by his actions. He had imagined a divine ruler or measuring stick of righteousness. And yet this passage suggested that rather than a divine ruler of righteousness, the Divine Ruler did not measure righteousness but gave it – freely, to everyone who had faith, to the Jew first and to the also to the Greek. Righteousness is not achieved but given. Righteousness is not measured but imputed – poured upon the believer.

Luther insists that reason, that devil’s whore, does not like this passage in Romans because reason wants to see clearly where the self stands based on the self’s accomplishments. In Rom 1:16-17, there is no list of measurable outcomes; there are no SMART goals that one can empirically verify have been achieved. But Luther, who as an academic and a teacher, as well as a formal law school student, skilled at logic and philosophical theory of justice, had seen that reason’s attempt to measure his own righteousness always showed that he had always fallen *deathly* short of the law’s requirements. So he was happy to see another way to justification. While the gospel proclamation of salvation was contrary to reason’s clear vision, by faith Luther could recognize that he was made righteous through Christ. This for Luther was an enormous relief.



In the preface to his Latin writings in 1545, Luther says that when he read this passage from Romans in 1515 he suddenly “saw the doors of Paradise fling open.”<sup>13</sup> And he was relieved to see later when reading *De spiritu et littera* that Augustine had seen the same truths. Luther was convinced by Scripture alone, but in 1515 Augustine was the doctor of the church, and Luther felt more confident to have the seal of orthodoxy on his side. Thus Luther filled his lecture notes on Romans in 1515 with the good news of justification by faith. In doing so he referred to Augustine over 100 times, and specifically to *De spiritu et littera* 20 times.

Interestingly, Luther does not seem to teach the good news. Marcus Wreidt claims that Luther’s lecture notes and his class notes are “astonishingly different.” Wreidt hypothesizes that Luther found himself too timid to proclaim this good news with as much gusto as he had planned in his lecture notes. Wreidt suggests that Luther was nervous that he would not be able to defend articulately enough this claim against the claims that it is heresy.<sup>14</sup> Of course there is also the possibility that he did in fact teach his written lecture but that the students were not yet ready to hear it, as their eyes were unable to see the message in the text, steeped as they were in the culture of justification by works. We do know, of course, that after 1517 Luther does not hold back and people are able to hear him clearly.

Why in 1515 does Luther set out to teach his students this understanding of righteousness, even if he is unwilling actually to do so in the classroom? And why in 1517 is Luther preaching it in Wittenberg to the public as well as to his students? And why at the Diet of Worms does Luther decide he must stand by this idea of righteousness by faith even if it tears him from the embrace of the church and even if tears apart the church itself? Why?

Gary Simpson, in a paper on Luther delivered last spring at the Midwest Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, in good Lutheran style denounced the common myth of Luther’s tower experience. Said Simpson, “Luther did not come to his Reformation insight while pooping, he came to it as a confessor who had heard the anxiety of many young monks and priests.”<sup>15</sup> Simpson’s point is that Luther was too humble and too medieval to have waged a Reformation for his own personal psychological salvation. Luther had heard the confessions of a great number of anxious monks who were dying under the letter of the law. Luther knew the anxiety of many, not just his own. Understanding that justification comes not from works but from faith in a loving God did not only set Luther free as a sinner, it also set him free as a confessor to tell his penitents about the life-giving promise of the Spirit, and it set him free as a teacher to tell his students this too.

I am struck particularly by Luther’s attention to the issue in his lecture notes on Romans that he planned to give his students. Luther, before teaching Romans, had taught Aristotle. In his lectures on Romans, Luther compares Paul and Augustine’s understanding of righteousness to Aristotle’s. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* explains to the reader that if one wants to become just one must do just acts. By doing just acts, one practices justice, one gets in the habit of justice, one becomes the kind of person who is just, from whom just acts flow. But Paul in Romans suggests that righteousness is not obtained in this way, rather God grants righteousness. Once made righteous a person can begin to behave justly towards one’s neighbor. In the same way, one does not become a priest by practicing the sacraments, but once one has been ordained as a priest one is able to perform the sacraments. Luther calls on Augustine to show his students that this is not merely his own reading of Paul’s letter to the Romans but that of the blessed African Doctor as well.<sup>16</sup>

Now one could write an academic paper that Aristotle’s point about how to teach and encourage justice in citizens is differently oriented than Paul’s or Augustine’s. Aristotle is writing a secular and practical book about how to help citizens behave more justly to each other in order to have a more harmonious and effective political state. And frankly, Luther, in his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, says similar things about how to order a state rightly. But in order to make this argument, one would have to make clear that there is a difference in talking about the law in order to be justified and talking about the law in order to have some good guidelines for being just to our neighbors. This is exactly the distinction that Luther was making to his students.

Luther needed to do this because if one does not first understand that one is made righteous by Christ through faith, one can never move on to having the practical ethical conversation. This is something I think Luther knew from his own philosophical teaching. I think often about Luther as a philosophy professor. This is because I am not a priest and not even a theologian. But as a philosophy professor, I hear confessions too, and I imagine Luther did so when he was teaching the philosophy of Aristotle.

I am the chair of the philosophy department at a small catholic women’s college called Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was founded and is sponsored by an Augustinian order of Roman Catholic sisters called the School Sisters of Notre Dame. At our university all of our students are required to take two philosophy courses. When I teach them, I hear confessions. And in their confessions I hear the anxiety my students have under the law.

Because I am a philosopher and not a priest, the confessions always come as questions. Because I am not a priest, I am not bound to the same sacred oath of confidentiality; I can tell you about these questions, although I will of course not give names and may change them somewhat so as to protect identities. Here are a few the things I have heard my students ask.

“Dr. Hockenbery, my friend said that her priest said that if someone really loves her boyfriend, it is not a sin if she sleeps with him. Is premarital sex a sin?”

“I am a bi-sexual, if I happen to fall deeply in love with another woman, will I go to hell?”

“My mother was married and divorced before she married my Dad. She did not get an annulment. Am I a bastard?”

“My mom is addicted to pain killers. She tells me I have to help her. Sometimes I steal them from the patients I serve at the nursing home. Whenever the patients run out of meds, they are replaced. They do not suffer, and one has to obey one’s parents – it’s one of the 10 commandments, right?”

“Dr. Hockenbery, I am pregnant, but I think I should have had an abortion. Am I bad person for having a baby I can’t afford? Or would I have been sent to hell if I’d had an abortion? Might I get sent to Hell even for admitting I kind of wish I had an abortion? But is having a baby out of wedlock any better?”

These questions *feel* inappropriate in a philosophy class. The language of hell and sin suggests that these are not practical ethical questions. They are not really about what is legal or about what is logical or what is healthy. These questions are not about what is virtuous in an Aristotelian sense. The questions are not about what is good for society. The questions are not about what will best “serve one’s neighbor.” These are not philosophical questions where reason can help.

Despite that, rather than just dismiss the question as inappropriate, I always try to turn to these questions in philosophical/thical ways first. Like a good philosopher, I do not answer their questions but ask more questions in an attempt to steer the students towards the practical, the logical, and the social aspects of their questions. For example: to the young woman asking about the sinfulness of pre-marital sex, I asked, “Why do you think there are social norms and taboos around sexuality? Do you think there are any risks in certain sexual behaviors to one’s health or emotional well-being? In your friend’s case what would she do if she gets pregnant?” To the student who asked if she should steal drugs for her mother, I asked, “Will it really help your mom in the long run to feed her addiction? What is your responsibil-

ity as a health care worker to your patients?” To the student who asks about abortion, I asked, “Do you think your fetus is a person that has rights? What are your obligations to the fetus? What is the value to society that your unborn child might bring? What is the obligation of society to you and your child? What is the role of the biological mother in caring for a child?” In other words, I try to reframe their questions as ethical questions.

But the students are too anxious even to begin to answer the type of questions I try to pose. They are impatient, they are in terror, they are *dying*. They become more frantic as they repeat their questions. “I am not asking if it is healthy, I am asking if this is a SIN.” “I am asking if I am a BAD person.” “I am asking, will I go to Hell?” “Please, just tell me how I can be pure.” “I want to be a good girl.”

The questions are clearly not about ethics; they are about *justification*. My students do not want to know what is healthy for themselves or beneficial to their neighbor. And my philosophical attempts to get them to think about their social obligations and Aristotle’s text about virtue and happiness just makes them angry. My students, and I suspect Luther’s students were similar, want to know how they can obtain value – in an absolute sense – before God. They want to know where they are on the measuring stick of righteousness. But their attempt to live under the letter of the law is giving them a sickness unto death. Their desire to fulfill the law so that they can claim they have value is killing them.

I do not mean this merely in the sense that they feel condemned. They do not just feel frightened that they may fall short of the law. Rather, they are in a position like that Augustine describes in *On the Spirit and the Letter*. Augustine claims that the more he hears the law, the more he rejects the law, for his desire to break the law is enflamed by the commandments. The more his desire to sin is inflamed, the more he feels guilty. And the more he feels guilty, the more he rejects the law. “The law is good and praiseworthy but without spiritual aid it increases by its prohibition the evil desire.”<sup>17</sup> Augustine suggests that in this way the law actually increases sin.<sup>18</sup> Augustine describes himself to be like a little boy whose divine mother tells him to clean his room, wash his face, and go to bed. While he hates the messiness in his room and on his face, while he is so very tired, the very act of his mother’s commanding – the nagging, if you will – makes him not want to do what she says. Yet, he can clearly see that her rules are in his best interest. The more he hears the law, however, the more he wants to break it.

This is what I see in my students. Take my student with her pre-marital sex question. She hears the law forbidding adultery and she cannot or will not even have a discussion about why it might be better, healthier, safer, to



wait. She wants to know if her love might purify the act. She is obsessed with the act and with purity. This student cannot think about what is in her own best interest. She cannot focus on the Aristotle text or on the class discussion. Nor can she focus on what is in the real interest of her partner or neighbor. Instead, she is obsessed with breaking the law and her feelings of guilt about her obsession. Thus, whether or not she eventually breaks the letter of the law against adultery and fornication, she is most certainly already breaking the one great commandment, to love and serve her neighbor. Her obsession with the letter of the law is causing her to sink into anxious narcissism. She is breaking, indeed, the spirit of the law. Yet, she may well be unaware of this. She may think that by obeying the letter of the law, through force of will, she is obeying the whole of the law and, thus, saving herself.

So many of my students – and so many of us – think that we gain salvation through choices, works, and willpower. For some, salvation means a ticket to heaven. For others, salvation simply means that they can justify themselves to themselves. They want to know that they have absolute value. But trying to justify one's life and person through works kills the ability actually to do good works, and kills the well-being of the psyche.

Augustine was clear about this. Says Augustine, “‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind,’ and ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.’ That in the fulfilling of these is the complete fulfillment of righteousness, is absolute truth. But to observe this must not be to forget how often we all go wrong in the belief that what we do is pleasing or not displeasing to God.”<sup>19</sup> Not only do we more often break the law when we obsess upon it (finding the object of desire suddenly so much sweeter because it is forbidden), but we often deceive ourselves when we try to live by the law. Our hypocritical self-righteousness ignores the ways in which we are breaking the law in order to concentrate on the ways we are holding it.

Since I teach at a university run by an Augustinian order, I often expect my students should understand this. I am often shocked at their Pelagianism. Luther, seeing how Augustine was considered the seal of orthodoxy, must have also thought his students and colleagues would see this clearly. Yet, in October of 1517 when Johann Tetzel was selling indulgences, Martin Luther was forced to realize that his fellow Christians did not see clearly.

In our day the spirit of Tetzel remains. In 2015 on so many billboards Jesus sits like Rhadamanthus<sup>20</sup> offering Heaven or Hell as a personal choice. A similar message is proclaimed on those secular “Pass it On” billboards and posters that line the streets in the inner city and the halls of public high

schools. These announce to passersby that they will gain Value and Success through Perseverance, Endurance, and Hard Work. Clear Channel, Successories, and Scholastic tell drivers, business owners, and students to share the “good news” about how we can justify ourselves through works.

Justification by faith may seem banal to Lutheran theologians, but it is as controversial to say aloud in public as it was in 1515. I wonder how often my lecture notes read differently than my student's notes on the subject. I am always a little worried that if I say too much they will think I am a heretic, so convinced are they that Christ is an angry judge. Sometimes I also worry that I will damage them in some way if I rip away their hope that they can be a success through hard work. Of course, as a philosopher, I often think this religious talk is none of my business.

But despite the domination of works-righteousness in American Christianity and American Capitalist mythology, Scripture, and Augustine, and Luther demand we listen to another truth and that we all, in the priesthood of all believers, proclaim it. “Our competence does not come from ourselves – but from God.” “For I am not ashamed of the gospel.... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith.” “What this means is that we cannot boast in the law. We must admit that no level of exterior obedience amounts to any level of inner justification.”<sup>21</sup> This means that the answer to the most consistently asked question of all my students is, “No, you are not ‘saved’ just because you are a pretty good person who is basically nice to other people. You are not justified by obeying the letter of the law. That is not enough, for we are not justified in God's sight by the works of the law – but on the contrary the works of the law are accomplished as a result of justification and righteousness.” In other words, “You are not saved just because you are a pretty nice person but because you are not a pretty nice person at all.” It is not that lots of very nice people are doing nice and loving things and God condemns them for not having faith; it is rather that none of us are very nice people doing nice and loving things. In fact, most of us are doing mostly mean, un-neighborly things. We are usually not even trying to serve our neighbor but only trying to appear to serve our neighbor. Most of us are chafing against the law, trying to do the letter but ignoring the spirit. And most of us are angry at the Lawgiver for being so harsh even as we know we are running from the law like a disobedient child holding her ears against the voice of her nagging mother. We are, as Augustine explains, screaming like naughty children who hate the nagging of the law, shouting “the fruit of forbidden desire is sweeter” even while complaining that our divine Mother is too strict and should recognize that we are basically nice people.

Then what can save us? If the more we hear the law the more we scream against it, how can we ever be free? When I was rereading Augustine *On the Spirit and the Letter* to prepare for this paper, I was struck suddenly as a mother and a philosophy teacher by Augustine's psychological insight. He says that the more we teach ethics, the less likely our children and our students will become ethical. Augustine says that the more we hear the law the more the "inner self is a house divided against itself".<sup>22</sup> The more we are told what to do the more we are in agony, unable to will ourselves to do what we really will to do. This makes me think of Augustine and his mother. Monica gives him rational, social arguments about why he should not take another concubine after divorcing his first, whom he loved dearly. And he does not disagree with his mother. Yet Augustine says the more he reproached himself and the more he recognized his error, the "more bitterly than ever I twisted and turned in my chain."<sup>23</sup>

This is difficult for a philosophy professor and a mother to hear. Rational arguments and firm rules do not help a child or a student reform. Instead they actually increase the desire to err or commit crime. Then what can be done to save us?

Augustine says that what changed his behavior was being pulled into the arms of God who lifted him so he could see, whispered in his heart so he could hear, and gave him faith that could not be doubted.<sup>24</sup> Also, Augustine said that he heard a voice call to him to take and read.<sup>25</sup> This was not a command but an invitation. In reading Scripture, Augustine felt the warm embrace of God. "How close I have come to you by your grace!"<sup>26</sup> "My love of you, O Lord, is not some vague feeling: it is positive and certain. Your word struck into my heart and from that moment I loved you."<sup>27</sup> "I, too, ask 'Where are you, my God?' and the answer I find is this. For a while I draw a breath of your fragrance when my soul melts within me and I cry out in joy, confessing your glory like a man exultant at a feast."<sup>28</sup> Augustine, when he puts down the books of the Platonists and the books of Cicero and the books of other New Academics, and takes up Scripture, cries out like a little boy called onto his mother's lap after a temper tantrum. Rather he rejoices like a lover who is embraced despite a series of wrong behavior. He writes love letters to the God who loves him. There is no more nagging of the law; Augustine finds himself simply in relationship with God. This relationship re-orientes him. Suddenly the law does not feel so onerous to him; it is just a part of his relationship.

I think it is interesting to note a difference between Augustine and Luther on this point. Without faith Augustine finds delight in breaking the rules, but he hates himself for it because he knows the rules are good

for him. Faith that he is right with God already takes away the "forbiddenness" of the sin, and with it all that is sweet about sin. In right relationship, sin is no longer desirable. Augustine recognizes that he does not really even like pears or adultery. These things were only enticing because they were forbidden. However, Luther describes himself as a monk who worked hard to follow the letter of every law. Luther did not steal pears or cheat on his fiancée. Yet Luther was angry with God for making such harsh laws and hating himself for being so angry. Faith that he is right with God took away Luther's anger at the harshness of the judge and allowed him no longer to dwell on his sin and seethe in that anger. With faith, Luther could begin to consider what really is commanded and think about what it means to serve his neighbor.

Yet, despite this difference in their responses to the law and the Spirit, both Luther and Augustine are proclaiming the same message. Whether the law makes us run from what we see is for our benefit or makes us hate what we think is unfairly judging us, the letter of the law kills us with despair. But the Spirit liberates us, brings us into relationship with God, justifies us, and lets us live. This Augustine proclaimed to his congregation, especially in an effort to undermine the deadly works-righteousness of Pelagius, but Augustine had been proclaiming this message long before debating Pelagius, as we see in the *Confessions*. Luther proclaimed the saving power of the Spirit in Wittenberg, especially in an effort to undermine Tetzl, but it is a message he began to proclaim in 1515 to students and a message he continued to proclaim long after Tetzl had been excommunicated.

I, even as a philosophy professor, have begun to consider proclaiming this same message. I still say: that is not the subject of this class. But sometimes in the hall if the student is still confessing to me after class, I say quietly, "I do understand your question. You are asking if you *deserve* to go to hell; you are asking if you are *Pure*. You are asking if you are *Good*. Well, to be honest, you probably *deserve* to go to Hell; you are probably *not pure* and *not good*. I do not know if your specific issue is damning you, but I am sure you have done something that harmed another, something that broke the 10 commandments, something that deserves death and condemnation. No, your actions have not made you a good person." As such my response is similar to what Augustine says to those who think they are made righteous because they have not yet broken a part of the law, "As if they imagine that they were fulfilling the law without their own righteousness, when they were rather breakers of it."<sup>29</sup> Augustine's point is that whenever we feel self-righteous, we are probably obeying the letter and not the spirit of the law. If we feel that we are righteous because we have not fallen in love with someone of our own sex, or because

we have not lost our virginity, we forget that we have broken many aspects of the law already. We have ignored the homeless, the imprisoned, the widowed, the orphaned, and the stranger. Self-righteousness makes our eyes blind to our neighbors' needs and our Christian duty.

When I explain this to the student, I usually get a response along the lines of, "Damn, that's harsh. I wasn't expecting you to say that." So I move pretty quickly from the law to the gospel. "Yes, you deserve death – but you are given Life." As Augustine says, "This fault had to be cleaned by grace. For God has done what the law weakened by flesh could not do."<sup>30</sup> If the student is a Christian – and usually they are if they are asking these questions – (we need to figure out why Christians are the most confused about Christianity) – I ask them, "Why was Jesus born, why did Jesus speak in a human voice for human ears to hear, why did Jesus present his body to be seen, touched and tasted, why did Jesus die, why was Jesus resurrected – if not out of love – to free you from the law?" I finish with, "You are PURE, You are GOOD, you are SAVED not by your actions but by God's. You have been justified by the love of God. You are not by your actions worthy of this and you cannot become worthy of it through future actions, but you can accept as a statement of faith that you are saved by God. Now that the door of paradise is clearly seen to be open, let's go back to our philosophy class and talk about what we can do to best be healthy and serve society and care for our neighbors. Now you need to think some more about the actual issues at hand. But we can't talk philosophically until you relax. You can't do the law until you first have cemented the relationship with the Lawgiver."

As Luther says, "What the law of works commands by threats, the law of faith accomplishes by believing. One says 'you shall not covet, the other says 'when I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, then I went to the Lord and besought him. Through the law of works God says 'Do what I command' but by the law of faith we can say to God in humble prayer: "Give me what Thou commandest."<sup>31</sup>

### *Faith: A Gift of the Spirit*

When Luther tells the "good news" of Romans, he is clear that righteousness comes only by faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> But Luther's good news does not solve all the problems. The question remains, what about the person who does not have faith? Such a person is still under the law and now feels commanded to believe what she does not believe. For some people this "good news" feels like just another law, the harshest law of all. But it is clear from the context that Luther is not commanding, he is re-assuring. He is saying that faith is enough. Faith will set us free. But the question remains, what if

I do not have faith? What about those who do not believe in Christianity, are they saved? What about those of us who are Christians, do we have to believe every article of faith, to the letter?

Clearly not. For if we cannot save ourselves through actions, we cannot save ourselves by an action of faith. This is particularly true of an act of faith, for faith is not like other actions. Faith cannot be commanded or willed. I can command my child to clean his room. I cannot command him to believe in God's love. I cannot even command him to believe in my love. Faith cannot be a commandment. Faith cannot be a work. One cannot force others to believe nor force oneself to believe. Seeing faith as a work is clearly making a category mistake.

Yet faith is the key to our justification, according to Luther, who goes so far as to say, "Fides est creatrix divinitatis, non in persona, sed in nobis."<sup>33</sup> This means, "Faith creates the deity, not in God's person but in ours." Luther continues:

For without faith God loses His glory, wisdom, righteousness, truthfulness, mercy, etc., in us; in short, God has none of His majesty or divinity where faith is absent. Nor does God require anything greater of man than that he attribute to Him His glory and His dignity; that is, that he regard Him, not as an idol but as God, who has regard for him, listens to him, shows mercy to him, helps him, etc. When He has obtained this, God retains His divinity sound and unblemished; that is, He has whatever a believing heart is able to attribute to Him. To be able to attribute such glory to God is wisdom beyond wisdom, righteousness beyond righteousness, religion beyond religion, and sacrifice beyond sacrifice. From this it can be understood what great righteousness faith is and, by antithesis, what a great sin unbelief is.<sup>34</sup>

### *Faith is Righteousness; Unbelief is Sin. What Does This Mean?*

Augustine suggests that all human knowledge begins with faith. For Augustine faith is the hypothesis that allows one to start exploration. Faith is the step out of nihilistic skepticism that believes nothing without proof. Faith believes in order to understand. Yet, Augustine insists that Christian faith, unlike scientific hypothesis, is a gift from God. He says that he is called in such a way he could not help but believe.<sup>35</sup> Augustine says that faith requires no force of will. Faith is not irrational but a necessary foundation for understanding, a foundation given by divine illumination.

In contrast, Luther says something more akin to all the post-Kantian Lutheran philosophers. (Feuerbach is clear that he (and they) learned every-

thing from Luther.) All that we know comes through the filter of our minds. What a thing-in-itself is, is irrelevant, for all we know is the thing for us. Feuerbach explains, “Luther was the first to let out the secret of Christian faith.... The key to the mysteries of faith lies in *us* ... he is God for us, omnipotent Creator for us, Holy Spirit for us. In short, it is the for *us* that he is what he is – the ‘us’ runs through all the articles.... The older faith also says, ‘Our Lord, Our God,’ but it underlines the ‘God’; Luther, on the other hand, underlines the ‘our.’”<sup>36</sup> Thus Luther is clear that if we do not have faith, God-in-himself does not cease to exist, but God ceases to exist *for us*. If we do not have faith in a loving God who justifies us, who loves us, who imputes righteousness upon us, then we are left without God. We have only our reason left, which will tell us that such a faith is foolishness. Says Luther, “When God speaks, reason regards His Word as heresy and as the word of the devil; for it seems so absurd.”<sup>37</sup> Luther continues, “When reason hears this, it is immediately offended and says: ‘Then are good works nothing? Have I toiled and borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat for nothing?’”<sup>38</sup> “Isn’t being basically nice enough to save me?”, reason asks, chafing against the angry judge.

But Luther’s point is not to chastise the rational person, but only to point to what experience has taught him. When reason is left as the only tool of the person without faith, self-righteousness, the attempt to make the self righteous will drive the person mad. Luther says he has known to go “to the point of insanity many men who tried with all their might to become completely righteous in a formal sense but could not accomplish it. And innumerable persons even among the authors of this wicked dogma were driven into despair at the hour of death, which is what would have happened to me if Christ had not looked at me in mercy and liberated me from this error.”<sup>39</sup>

I do not believe that Luther is being hyperbolic when he says people are driven “to the point of insanity.” I have witnessed this same pattern in enough students. First, there is the proclamation of self-reliance: ‘I don’t need anyone else. I take care of myself. I will be the change I want to see in the world.’ Then in a week or so there is the cycle of guilt: “Why am I not succeeding? Why is there still so much poverty? Why can I not break my cycle of addiction?” And then there is depression, anxiety, and sometimes even a suicide attempt or a suicide. I know the cycle well enough that I call the counseling center earlier and earlier as I age as a professor.

I know I am not the only one who sees this. After one particular outburst in a class, a student who was a self-proclaimed atheist and believer in self-reliance, began to sob about her inability to solve racism in the world

and in her own person. I watched the theology professor hug her and say, “Don’t feel guilty. That’s not what I want. We are reading this because I just want students to open their eyes to the suffering in the world. But I don’t want you to feel guilt.” In that moment, the theology professor could not issue a *command* to the student to *do* more social justice. The law was already killing her. Nor could she issue a command to trust in Christ. Such trust is never a choice. The Spirit cannot be commanded. In such a situation the professor could only work on her own relationship with the student.

Augustine is clear in his autobiographical *Confessions* that he does not choose Christ; Christ chooses him. In fact Christ pursues him as Augustine runs in the other direction. Christ overtakes him, embraces him, and warms him in love. Indeed, in *The Spirit and the Letter*, Augustine says that “freedom of choice could produce no art of belief were there no inducement or invitation to belief.”<sup>40</sup> Augustine continues, “Assuredly then it is God who brings about in a man the very will to believe.”<sup>41</sup> Luther is similarly clear that he does not choose faith either but is liberated by Christ.

So then what happens when we lose our faith, or do not have faith at all? Luther suggests that this happens daily. Then we find that we are back under the law, crying out, “What can I do to have value? What can I do to be a good person?” What do we do then? We vacillate between self-righteousness that results in negligence of and cruelty to our neighbors and anxiety and self-doubt that result in negligence and cruelty to our neighbors. That is what we *do*.

What stops this? We cannot try to “do” faith. Luther mocks those who try to do faith:

On the other hand, the self-righteous, who do not have faith, do many things. They fast; they pray; they lay crosses on themselves. They suppose that in this way they are placating the wrath of God and meriting grace. But they do not give glory to God; that is they do not regard Him as merciful, truthful and faithful to His promises. No, they consider Him an angry judge, who must be placated by their words. In this way they despise God, accuse Him of lying in all His promises, and deny Christ and all His blessings. In short, they depose God from his throne and set themselves up in His place.... They suppose that God is pleased with these, and they hope to receive a reward from Him for them. Therefore they do not bring death to reason, God’s bitterest enemy; they give it life. They deprive God of His majesty and divinity, and they attribute this to their own works. Therefore faith alone attributes glory to God.”<sup>42</sup>

- 28 Ibid., XIII.14, 320-321.  
 29 Augustine, as quoted in LW 25:22.  
 30 Augustine, as quoted in LW 25:244.  
 31 LW 25:243  
 32 LW 25:242  
 33 WA 40/1:360,5. (LW 26:227).  
 34 LW 26:227.  
 35 See *Confessions*, VII.10.  
 36 Quoted in Carter Lindberg, "Faith Creates the Deity," in *The Devil's Whore*, 111.  
 37 LW 26:228.  
 38 LW 26:231.  
 39 LW 26:233.  
 40 *Spirit and Letter*, 60 xxxiv, 244-245.  
 41 Ibid.  
 42 LW 26:229.  
 43 LW 26:233  
 44 Wreidt, "Augustine and Luther: Revisited," 39.

*Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth is Professor of Philosophy at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where she teaches a wide array of courses in the history of philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of religion. Her recent books include the monograph Thinking Woman: A Philosophical Approach to the Quandary of Gender (Cascade/Wipf and Stock, 2015) and the edited volume The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition (Fortress Press, 2011).*

## Chapel Sermon, October 6, 2015, Prov. 31:10-31

*Lamar Bailey*

When I first saw that the assigned readings for today included Proverbs 31, I had, let's say, a very strong and intense reaction. I'm putting it nicely for church folks. I didn't even need to look up the passage. I knew immediately it was the "Capable Wife" text.

You see, I suffer from a self-diagnosed condition I call EFTS – Evangelical Fundamentalist Trauma Syndrome. I know there are a few of you out there who experience the same thing, and you know what I'm talking about. Let's just say I had a relapse of EFTS when I saw Prov 31:10-31 on today's reading list.

In my past life, the one prior to my life as a Lutheran, I was raised as an Evangelical Fundamentalist. And in my Christian circles, my Christian school, my church, and even in the wider community in which I was raised, the Bible, and in particular certain parts of the Bible, were wielded like a battle-ax and not as a source of comfort and consolation like our dear *Book of Concord* constantly recommends.

In my religious circles prior to becoming Lutheran, the Capable Wife text is routinely used as a model or checklist for women to live up to. Starting at a young age, this text is taught to young girls as a roadmap on how to be a good Christian woman, wife, daughter, sister, mother, and so forth. And if a woman is having problems in life, if she isn't married or if she is having relationship problems with her husband, the answer to her problems is simple – she is obviously not living according to Proverbs 31.

Most people experience me as calm, maybe laid-back, and emotionally in control – except on the football field or basketball court. I'm definitely not one to cry. But over the last few weeks I have found myself spontaneously fighting back tears and being overwhelmed with incredible sadness.



You see, I've recently had the opportunity to reconnect with some friends. I've always tried to stay in touch with my friends, but some of them have held me at arm's length for years, even decades. And only recently have I learned why. Some of the women I've known since I was very young, some of the people who I love the most, are chained in bondage in abusive relationships, are being emotionally tortured, and are simply dying a slow, dehumanizing death. And when I speak with them and beg and plead with them to remove themselves from their situation, they say, "I can't." And the last hurdle as to why they can't always comes down to a handful of Bible verses. And Proverbs 31 is the one Bible passage that they can't get over.

And there are too many women in my life and in our congregations who believe they can't forgive themselves or live into God's love because they have left an abusive relationship and are convinced that they are failures because they did not live up to the idealized woman in Proverbs 31. And this is because they have been programmed with an interpretation of the Bible that has been used to maintain male dominance and power.

The biblical world and the context for our text today is a world of intense patriarchy – male domination – where even the concept of 'woman' is defined by men. In biblical times, unfortunately, there was no Simone de Beauvoir asking what it means to be a woman. No Sojourner Truth proclaiming "Ain't I a Woman?" In the time of Proverbs, there were no Doctors Largen, Erling, Stevens, Stjerna, Michelle Carlson, or Zimmann.

So, the Bible and other ancient literature are infused with patriarchy. Add on top of that, centuries of Christian biblical interpretation dominated by men, and the outcome is that many texts have a strong patriarchal interpretation that is still prevalent today. Particularly today's text from Proverbs.

But sound scholarship is slowly and persistently breaking down these patriarchal interpretations. Today's text gives us a peek into a different time, society, and worldview, with men at the top and women somewhere near the bottom. Not surprisingly, much of the book of Proverbs is wisdom literature addressed to young men.

Today's reading from Proverbs is written in the form of an acrostic poem; each line starts with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet, like A to Z. The book of Proverbs is bookended by two women. In Proverbs 1-9, Wisdom is personified as a woman, while the Capable Wife in our text today is the woman at the conclusion of the book. Each woman is illustrated with similar styles, themes, and language, allowing the alert reader to associate these two women with each other.

Some view today's text not as the capable woman but as a strong

woman – a woman of military strength and skill. In this view, the Proverbs 31 woman does not fit into the stereotype of oppressed or subordinate women in the Ancient Near Eastern world.

Scholar Carol Meyers sees the Proverbs 31 woman as a woman who has power to make economic and social decisions; a woman who is a hardworking household manager (31:27). She does all of the traditional household duties. She manages the labor of household members (31:15), produces and sells goods (31:13, 18, 24), and she buys property and makes it productive (31:16). This autonomous ability of a woman to enact commercial transactions is actually reflected in archaeological discoveries.<sup>1</sup>

But what is exciting, hopeful, and Good News to my ears as the father of two little girls is *that what was once impossible, incomprehensible, and unknown is today now possible*. Today women are biblical scholars, historians, and theologians. They are scientists, doctors, and CEO's. Women are running for the highest office in the land. God is also working through women and bringing much needed and vital biblical interpretation to texts that have been poorly interpreted by some and continue to ruin lives.

Much is still broken. Women in developing countries suffer unspeakable violence and mutilation; in our country, our political system often struggles to pass common-sense legislation such as the Violence Against Women Act; women still face the old boys' club, discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and they don't get paid as much as men for doing the same job.

Where is the hope in today's text? I think it is all around us. It's that God is doing what God promised God was going to do – redeeming us and the cosmos from the power of sin and death. God is breaking through our sinful, broken, and limited worldviews of gender and biblical interpretation and creating in us new ways of seeing, hearing, and reading. God is enabling individuals, nations, and cultures to see the world anew; to see the world in the context of God's unfolding promise to redeem and transform what is broken; to see that God is always bringing us into new understandings and biblical interpretations and ways of seeing the world.

Today more women than ever are pastors. We celebrate the power of God at work in our own Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and in the tenure of Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. And there are too many other women across the world to name each here.

In 1970 the former Lutheran Church in America ordained Rev. Elizabeth A. Platz. She was the first Lutheran woman ordained in North America and a graduate of Gettysburg Seminary. Recently, looking back over her time as a pastor she said, "Never underestimate the persistence of God."<sup>2</sup>



This is our promise today; a promise for those who honor and fear the Lord, and for those who seek wisdom: Never underestimate the power, wisdom, and persistence of God.

AMEN.

### Notes

- 1 Carol Meyers: <http://www.Bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/strong-woman-prov-31.aspx>.
- 2 Elizabeth A. Platz, quoted in: “Still serving after all these years ...,” [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=9462](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=9462).

*Lamar Bailey is an M.Div. student at Gettysburg Seminary (class of 2016) and an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient. Prior to attending seminary, he worked for over ten years on policy issues related to poverty, peace, homelessness, and domestic violence. Bailey most recently served as a Policy Impact Coordinator with the American Friends Service Committee's Office of Public Policy and Advocacy. Prior to this, he served as a Policy Associate at the National Conference of State Legislatures and worked with homeless individuals at the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. He holds a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Colorado, Denver.*

## Gettysburg Seminary Opening Academic Convocation 2015

*Ann Milliken Pederson*

The question for this opening convocation talk is: Why and how should seminaries integrate science into seminary curriculum? As an introduction, I offer two anecdotes. First, several years ago, I heard Loyal Rue, now professor emeritus at Luther College, offer the following remark:

Imagine being told after all these years that the woman who runs your neighborhood deli is, in fact, your sister. Would this information make a difference? Of course it would. In a similar way, the Epic of Evolution has the potential to affect the manner of our beholding and interacting with the entire natural world. I cannot remain indifferent to the fact that every living being on the planet shares a common heritage. This new epic goes beyond literal declaration of human solidarity to affirm family ties throughout the community of life. Never mind the lady at the deli – you're genetically related to the sandwich she sells you.<sup>1</sup>

All of us are related not only to each other, but also to everything in this cosmos. I interpret the words from John 3:16, “For God so loved the world (cosmos)” differently now after I hear those words from Loyal Rue. That the Word becomes flesh must be interpreted not only in terms of the scriptures, but also in light of all we know about the creation. To understand the incarnation I must also study the natural world.

Second, when I was in college I took a course in the physics department about musical acoustics, and I give credit to the physics professor with creating one of those experiences in life when everything seems to come together,

for one brief moment. When we were studying the overtone series, and I was practicing the overtone series on my flute, I realized that the physics of music shaped the development of Western classical music and also how I had learned what it meant to be Lutheran. While I acknowledge that reading Martin Luther shaped some of what I know about Lutheranism, I give more credit to learning the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and singing Lutheran hymnody. My whole spiritual ancestry came together when I put the physics of music together with the theology of music. This moment of religion and science propelled me to see how important it is to understand and interpret the way that God works in the world, and this meant I needed to pay attention to what the sciences say. I went to seminary the following year. Music is the most important expression of my Christian faith. Consequently, music will be the metaphor that I use to explain the reason and method for integrating science into seminary curriculum.

So, why and how should seminaries integrate science into seminary curriculum? The reason is: Christian leaders are called to interpret the Word of God – Scripture and the book of nature – and science helps to reveal the composition of creation that is being continually created by God the Composer. First, it helps Christians understand and interpret the creation of God. Second, because to not do so would be to fail the way we pass on the Christian tradition and proclaim the gospel to the world around us. Third, because science itself is a creative process that like religion engages the meaning of life and the broad questions of existence. Science reveals who we are and our place in the universe. Chad Orzel, physicist and author, writes: “For as long as there have been humans, then, there have been humans doing science.... The process of science is not some incidental offshoot of more general human activity; it’s the very thing that makes us who we are.”<sup>2</sup> Science is a process of interpretation, and it helps us learn about who we are as human beings. It’s one thing to talk about this in abstraction; it’s another to do so in the particular setting of planning a seminary curriculum.

### *Methodology and Metaphor*

What are ways to integrate science into seminary curriculum? I find it helpful to consult scientists. I read Chad Orzel’s book, asked the scientists with whom I work at Augustana College, and did some basic research in science education journals. Nearly all the scientists offered different metaphors for the way they work and teach. Since seminaries educate pastoral leaders, their task is to help them become scientifically literate. Pastoral leaders need to know where and how to gain access to scientific information, to decide whether it is reliable or not, and then put it to good use. Our hope is that

this is what will be accomplished in the basic courses at Gettysburg Seminary. To begin, we examine scientific methodology and inquiry.

What are metaphors that scientists use for their inquiry and method? A study entitled, “Putting the Puzzle Together: Scientists’ Metaphors for Scientific Inquiry,” was very helpful for characterizing metaphors used by research scientists as they described their experiences with authentic scientific inquiry.<sup>3</sup> I offer the following examples of how scientists approach their work:

1. Cooking not just following the recipe: There are different variations on each idea.<sup>4</sup>
2. Playing a Cello: “Yo Yo Ma, who is a cello player, says that interpretation is not passive. It’s not just playing the notes as they are written; it’s putting something of your own, yourself there.”<sup>5</sup>
3. Farming and gardening: “The farmer guides the process according to their own goals and purpose much as a scientist guides the process of scientific inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of their questions.”<sup>6</sup>
4. Writing of poetry: Science is a creative act or “producing a unique creative work within a structural frame.”<sup>7</sup> Or from another applied scientist: “That was a big realization for me – you don’t actually just learn the book and spit it back; it’s like you are making the book.”<sup>8</sup>
5. Learning a language: “This ability to think abstractly about a problem is absolutely crucial. It’s also crucial to have a lot of facts at your disposal; it’s very vaguely like learning a foreign language. You have to learn syntax and grammar and that’s the thinking abstractly part, how things were generally put together. But, also to learn a foreign language you have to learn vocabulary. In science you must know a set of a reasonably large number of facts.”<sup>9</sup>
6. Building a mosaic artwork: Scientists combine pieces and patterns, but yet see the whole as well.<sup>10</sup>

This study concludes that “[t]he metaphors used by scientists to articulate aspects of their conception of scientific inquiry identified five broad characteristics of scientists engaged in scientific investigations: open-mindedness, putting yourself in your work, utilizing resources, problem solving, and

making connections.”<sup>11</sup> These characteristics are not so dissimilar to what happens in the methodologies of theology and hermeneutics. All are creative, communal processes that involve interpreting, composing, and imagining new possibilities. Likewise, the metaphor of music also embodies these same processes and will serve as our primary theological metaphor for the process of integrating science into a seminary curriculum.

### *Creating Connections and Making Meaning*

If we looked only at the caricatures of the ways that science and religion are reported to relate to one another, the musical score would be a dissonant, agitated fugue where the two voices only battle with one another for the audience’s attention. Such war-like sounds seem to represent that which creates the most attention in the media and in popular debates. However, science and religion have not always, nor need not necessarily be in conflict with one another. Instead, we want to see how they can create meaning when their two voices come together around issues of ultimate importance.

To create connections is to generate meaning. “This ability to make connections is an essential characteristic of conducting scientific inquiry investigations. This skill requires the ability to synthesize large amounts of data and to see the patterns that exist between the data so that the meaning can be given.”<sup>12</sup> However, as we noted, science and religion have often been separated by either their supposed war with each other or their mutual indifference. Arthur Peacocke, a biochemist and Anglican theologian writes: “I am convinced that this widely accepted view is mistaken and that the myth of the gulf between Christian theology and the natural sciences is debilitating to our culture while impoverishing the spiritual and personal life of the generations who have come to believe it.... Such a theology needs to be consonant and coherent with, though far from being derived from scientific perspectives on the world.”<sup>13</sup> He spent his life creating consonance and coherence between Christian theology and the natural sciences. Theology cannot, as he notes, be derived from the sciences but must engage and be connected with the sciences so we make sense of the world around us as the creation of God. I offer two specific examples of how this happens.

Science helps us to imagine a bigger picture of our place in the world than we can do alone. Over the last few years, I have had one of those “aha” moments when the light comes on and science illuminates what I thought I knew. One of the most fundamental affirmations of Christianity is that God created this world and that we are God’s creatures. Yet, now, I see and hear this affirmation in completely new ways. Almost every January, Maureen

Diggins, PhD, an emerita faculty member at Augustana University, and I team-teach a course on reproductive sciences and religion. The biology and the technologies change every year so that the way we teach the course is constantly being revised. The biological understanding of the beginnings of life partners with the Christian affirmations about God and God’s creation, and the students use language like: “I’ve never thought about this before in such an amazing way.” Or “I never thought a course in science would enrich my faith so much.”

During that same course on reproduction and religion, we have had the privilege of inviting Leonard Hummel, Ph.D., to give a talk on an evolutionary perspective on cancer and theology. He speaks not only with our class but also to another interdisciplinary course on the life cycles, health, and history. Dr. Hummel’s talk turned out to be a very important and timely moment for Rob Oliver, the President of Augustana University. One of Rob’s closest friends had just died from a long, exhausting battle with cancer, and Rob was struggling with his own grief and questions with which he wrestled. Rob came to Leonard’s talk and later told me that he had taken lots of notes on his phone and sent them immediately to his wife. As he learned about the way our cells in our body work and how this is part of the way evolution works, something changed for Rob. Leonard often reminded us that cancer is not some foreign invader from the outside but comes from within us, from the very fiber of our being. The process of cancer is deeply rooted in our evolutionary history, and in a history of our planet that Christians claim God has created and continues to create. Whatever happened for President Oliver that day during the lecture created new connections between the science of cancer and the theology of his Christian faith. Something made sense in a new and personal way.<sup>14</sup>

### *Consonance and Dissonance: Reforming, Transforming*

When we interpret our cosmologies within our theological and cultural frameworks, dissonances are bound to occur. They are no less musical, and we must attend to these powerful harmonies for what they teach us. What begins as a disruptive dissonance leads to a creative new consonance. I offer two examples: one from research centers in the state of South Dakota and the other in an encounter I had at Augustana College.

Nestled in the Black Hills in Lead, South Dakota, is a new research lab, the Sanford Underground Research Laboratory, hereby noted as SURE. From the website:

The Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead, South Dakota, advances our understanding of the universe by providing laboratory space deep underground, where sensitive physics experiments can be shielded from cosmic radiation. Researchers at the Sanford Lab explore some of the most challenging questions facing 21st century physics, such as the origin of matter, the nature of dark matter and the properties of neutrinos.<sup>15</sup>

SURF is situated in the former Homestake Gold Mine that ceased operations in 2003. The company donated the land for use as an underground lab and in 2006 T. Denny Sanford donated around \$70,000,000 to the project along with monies from the South Dakota State Legislature. In 2011 the Department of Energy, in cooperation with the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, agreed to support ongoing science operations at Sanford Lab, while also exploring “how to use the underground research facility for other longer-term experiments.”<sup>16</sup> On the eastern side of South Dakota, in Sioux Falls, Denny Sanford has also funded cutting edge research in healthcare at Sanford Health and Research. So, from one end of the state to the other, exciting scientific research marks the eastern and western borders of South Dakota.

What lies between the borders, however, is often hidden and goes unnoticed by most South Dakotans. Interstate 90 cuts from east to west but does not go through the reservations. Over the last four years, I have traveled many times from East to West, on Interstate 90 and occasionally on the roads less traveled (Highway 18, Highway 44). What I have felt in deeper ways on these trips is an intensified dissonance between the monies and research of places like the Sanford Underground Research Facility and Sanford Research in Sioux Falls and the genocide and displacement of the Native Americans. In my research I came across an article about this kind of cultural dissonance between the Sanford Lab and local tribes. The article appeared in *Nature* a few years ago. Here is an excerpt from the article:

Deep in South Dakota’s Black Hills, engineers are halfway through pumping water from a 2.6 km deep mineshaft near the town of Lead. By 2015, U.S. researchers hope, this watery hole will have dried out and become home to one of the country’s biggest science infrastructure projects: the deep underground science and engineering laboratory.... But the U.S. \$500 million plan has found one of its most difficult tasks on the surface. The struggle to meet goals to work with local Native Americans, whose cooperation is vital to keeping the

project on track.... The local Native American tribes are wary. Long ill-treated by the federal government, who seized the land for its gold more than a century ago and then polluted it with mine runoff, they’re cautious about the new influx of government scientists. Physicists visited local powwows to stamp out rumors about Homestake being turned into a nuclear waste dump. Passion and bitterness still runs strong, even among the Native American students.”<sup>17</sup>

Many of the problems that Native Americans face are invisible to most people in South Dakota. I need to discover that living merely at surface level will not help me to face the disparities, prejudices, and problems that are on the reservations.

Rarely are Native Americans consulted first about their worldviews when projects like SURF are brought into lands that they consider sacred. They are hardly ever asked what is important to them and what they might contribute to a project like SURF. Like many people in South Dakota, I need to listen and learn from my Native American neighbors. I’m trying. For example, this summer I was able to visit some of the sites of the sacred geography of the Lakota: Bear Butte Lake, Devils Tower, Indian Kara and Harney Peak, the racetrack, Reynolds Prairie and other upland prairies, rapid Creek and Eastern Black Hills, Willow Creek, War Bonnet Creek, and other locales south of the Black Hills. I drove for several days on back roads to find the places, to take some time at them, and to read about them. Many Lakota, Cheyenne, and Kiowa peoples believe their origins were in the stars and that they return to the stars. The tribal studies of constellations and of the skies are very sophisticated. They also know that humans are but a part of the whole landscape of the heavens and the earth. In a recent article, one of the tribal leaders who visited the Sanford Underground Research Lab noted: “Our tribes’ history and knowledge – and the Native way of knowing – is validated by the science, especially when we’re talking about astrophysics and star people, Russell notes. ‘Natives seem to have knowledge about what is really already there and this science is actually compatible,’ he adds.”<sup>18</sup> What I have learned is that religion and science are much deeper than the surface narratives we often learn.

Science and religion as narrative endeavors must pay attention to the local, to the “where” in the story. Hope exists in the weaving of new narratives. Several tribal leaders have visited the Sanford Underground Research Lab. John Yellow Bird Steel stated this as he emerged from the depths of the lab: “It is our belief that our ancestors came into this world for an opening of what is now known as the wind Cave work sacred Black Hills. After my

experience of going underground, I feel it as if I have just been reborn.”<sup>19</sup> And in the same article in the Lakota Country Times, the following kinds of data were reported that help create new and continue ongoing partnerships between Native Americans and SURF: (a) Future plans for the SURF educational/visitor center which will include Native American history and cosmologies, (b) a research facility and proposed internship and scholarship opportunities for the tribal college students, (c) the gear up Sanford Lab partnership which began in 2009, (d) Red cloud Indian schools combine science and journalism pilot program, (e) the Crow Creek Lower Brule program brought scientists to the schools for on-site science related workshops, (f) and Native American scientists are now working at SURF. It’s a start. I’m hopeful that these local narratives about science and religion will continue to change. But these changes must come through the interchange of new ways of telling them, and particularly of paying close attention to where they have come from. Meanwhile I have much to learn, and so I continue to engage and learn from new voices and from my colleagues who are scientists.

A few weeks ago I sat and listened to Dr. Jenny Arens Gubbels, my partner for this grant on religion and science with the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, give a presentation to me on evolution and cancer. She explained to me: “Every cell in our bodies is poised on the edge of cancer.” I thought about that with some interest about the biology of cancer. What I didn’t know was that a few days later I would receive a phone call that I was diagnosed with DCIS (sometimes known as Stage 0 breast cancer) or *ductal carcinoma in situ*. I’m now very grateful for the education that I have received not only from Jenny but also from many others so that when I received this information, I myself was more informed. I had surgery for DCIS and just finished radiation. Most recently, I have been thinking about of all those people in my family and network of friends who have had cancer: my mother, her mother, her sister, an aunt, and now friends who have family members who are undergoing serious cancer recurrences. Jenny Gubbels is teaching me something that I need to remember: life is precarious and we are all poised on the edge of something that makes us aware of our finitude and mortality. I’m learning in an even deeper way than ever before, deeper into my cellular structure, that this is the way life is, the way the world works, and that God is at work in that world and my life. Cancer is the result of chance and necessity, as my friend Leonard Hummel explains. And then God is in, with, and under all of this.<sup>20</sup>

Talking with friends over dinner the other night at a local pub made me realize again that when I express my Christian faith and can make sense of the incarnation at all, it is through the relationships that I have. And not

just any old relationships but the ones who know what it is like to face their own mortality and to come through it with a new strength and vitality. This diagnosis and treatment for me is small in the face of so much suffering that others undergo. Yet, I will admit that hearing the word cancer is never one you want to hear. My wonderful primary care doctor called me at home with the news. I’m so grateful for her. I debated about putting this news on Facebook. But the very reason I was reluctant is the very reason I need to do it: breast cancer (or any other cancer) should not be stigmatized, and those of us who have it, whether in an early form or at a much later stage, can offer our reflections and assurance we gain from the community of saints around us.

The older I get the less I long for answers and the more I linger in the mystery and finally in the loving relationships I have found through the grace of God incarnate in those around me – both human and non-human. Grace isn’t about an assurance that life won’t “happen”. But it’s a wager that the relationships in which I live, move, and have my being are upheld by the loving arms of God. The older I get the less I long for answers and the more I linger in the mystery and finally in the loving relationships I have found through the grace of God incarnate in those around me – both human and non-human. About ten years ago, I wrote a little book with the Rev. Dr. Arthur Peacocke, a biochemist and theologian. About the time that the book came out, Arthur was diagnosed with cancer and it had spread through his bones. Ironically, during his career as a scientist, he had spent much time working on DNA and cancer, and as a theologian, he had wrestled over and over with the role that chance plays in our lives, as explained in the work of Jacques Monod. In his final days he wrote,

Over the years I have given much thought and spilt much ink on the nature of God and God’s interactions with people. Not surprisingly the subtler nuances of my deliberations have fallen away before the absolute conviction that God is love and eternally so. This remains the foundation of my prayers and thoughts for ‘underneath at the everlasting arms.’ This is not always easily experienced and it needs much concentrated meditation – the ‘black dog’ of depression is sometimes difficult to expel. . . . Another of my concerns over the years has been the recurrence of what theologians call ‘natural evil’. The irony is that one of the examples I took was the role of mutations in DNA which are the basic source of evolution, and so of the emergence of human beings – and also of cancer. This is a new challenge to the integrity of my past thinking. I am only enabled to meet this challenge by my root



conviction that God is Love as revealed supremely in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Both Arthur Peacocke and Dietrich Bonhoeffer drew on musical analogies to explain God's relationship to the world amidst deep suffering. Bonhoeffer wrote:

I notice repeatedly here how few people there are who can harbour conflicting emotions at the same time. When bombers come, they are all fear; when there is something nice to eat, they are all greed; when they are disappointed, they are all despair; when they are successful, they can think of nothing else. . . . By contrast, Christianity puts us into many different dimensions of life at the same time; we make room in ourselves, to some extent, for God and the whole world. . . . Life isn't pushed back into a single dimension, but is kept multi-dimensional and polyphonous."<sup>22</sup>

The composition of God's creation is multifarious in its dimensions, and the music comes to life when we listen to its different voices.

### *The Composition of Creating Communities of Discourse: Community and Composition*

So, how do we integrate science into seminary curriculum and what difference will it make? The way we practice our faith creates the communities in which we live and work. Practice will not make perfect, but it might make things a lot more interesting to listen to. To learn science, theologians/pastors need to be with scientists in their parish. Leaders of the church need to "practice" their scientific vocabulary by learning it from the experts. As we noted earlier, learning the scientific method (or for that matter, theological method) is like learning another language, and it is not easy. It reminds me that as a person with a dominant right-hand I had a very difficult time learning to play a Bach Three Part Invention and having to use my left hand to play an inner voice. I practiced those musical measures over and over, in different patterns, until it became "second-hand" to use a bad pun. As leaders in the church, we must do the same with science.

One goal of learning science and how science works is to help people listen to and interpret their faithful and wise responses in a public setting. Too many of us have listened to the "popular" version of religion and science that reminds me of listening to a song composed of a simplistic chord progression. The same thing is repeated over and over and over. Often, the

lyrics are vapid. Both science and religion become caricatures, often pitted against each other as competing authorities. However, in reality neither works that way. The music is way more complex and intricate. We must develop good listening skills and be open to new harmonies. Science and religion are not abstractions with one simple theme, but instead they are complex narratives embodied by particular individuals with specific harmonies and melodies. We must listen to multiple voices and learn from them so that we can interpret the themes of the Christian tradition in rich and new ways that remain faithful to the gospel but fruitful in their appropriation. Our sermons, liturgies, educational materials, and outreach are opportunities for such transformation. I leave you with one such example. This was a prayer written for Arthur Peacocke's funeral in 2006. I adapted it and used it in my ordination in the spring of 1997. I had hoped that Arthur would have been at my ordination. His grandson wrote the prayer, and in it I find the words that summarize best why science should be integrated into seminary curriculum:

*Creator* God, in whom we live and move and have our being, you fashion the foundation of the earth as a fugue and scatter the stars as a symphony; we praise you for the energy of the universe, for the processes of evolution, for the intricacies of genetic structures and for the marvels of the human mind. Especially we give you thanks for friends and family and for all you have shown us of your great love. Illuminate our hearts with compassionate curiosity so that with all who study the mysteries of your creation we may be true witnesses to your glory and faithful stewards of your gifts through him through whom you make all things new, even Jesus Christ your creative Word. Amen.

### *Notes*

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- 4 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*



- 9 Ibid., 29.
- 10 Ibid.
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- 13 Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (London, UK: Basic Blackwell; SCM, 1990, 1993) viii.
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- 20 See Hummel and Woloschak, “Chance, Necessity, Love.”
- 21 Arthur Peacocke, “Nunc Dimittis,” in *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Philip Clayton; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007) 992-193. In “Chance, Necessity, Love,” Hummel and Woloschak unpack the implications of Peacocke’s claim that divine love may be discerned in, with, and under the chance and necessity that inform all evolutionary phenomenon—including cancers.
- 22 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Letter of 29 May 1944,” in *Letters and Papers from Prison* (ed. Eberhard Bethge; New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972) 310-311.

*Ann Milliken Pederson is Professor of Religion at Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Her teaching and research interests meet at the intersection of religion, medicine, and science. Her most recent work, co-authored with Philip Hefner and Susan Barreto, is entitled Our Bodies are Selves (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015). Her doctorate in theology is from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Augustana University and Gettysburg Seminary are partners in a Science for Seminaries grant from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

## Spirit in the World: Cry and Comfort – A Lutheran Perspective

*Nelson Rivera*

“Spirit in the World” speaks from different strands of Christian thinking about Spirit in our experience of the world.<sup>1</sup> There are at least three reasons for the title. There is the biblical witness, especially St. Paul’s words on the Spirit’s outcry and the Spirit’s sigh in her intimate relation to the believer. There are also Luther’s comments on the relevant biblical passages, examining them in the broader context of Luther’s views on the Holy Spirit and faith. In addition, a few words about the ways in which we experience feelings of joy and sorrow as a window to an important aspect of the Spirit’s work in us.

The emphasis on “cry and comfort,” though primarily taken from the biblical witness, also brings to mind some expressions of Karl Marx about religion and its role among the poor and oppressed of the world. In Marx’s much quoted words on religion, written in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he intimated that one of the outcomes of the practice of religion is to keep the poor, the mass of people, in alienation from themselves as well as marginal to the prevalent social order. That is, however, not all that he said. In truly dialectical mode, Marx thought that the paradoxical nature of religious experience is such that although it could lead to new kinds of slavery and oppression, it also represents a cry for freedom and resistance.

This is what Marx said: “Religious suffering is at once the expression of real suffering and the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions.” Most of the time, however, what people remember – and maybe the only Marx they know – is the following sentence: “Religion is the opium of the people,” thus missing the dialectical character of his

thought.<sup>2</sup> For Marx, religion is a way that humans have used to deal with the world, on the one hand, in order to interpret it and then to justify it; and, on the other hand, as a way to express their discomfort with the world. Therefore, the critique of the ways of the world, the critique of society, begins with the critique of religion by understanding it in order to disallow its illusions.

As British religious philosopher and theologian Keith Ward, using a slightly different translation of Marx's text, explains:

Marx opposed the powers of organized religion, which he saw as oppressive and reactionary. But his attitude to religion is more ambiguous than is sometimes realized. Everyone knows the famous quotation, "Religion is the opium of the people", but not as many know the sentences that immediately precede it: "Religious suffering is at the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. . . the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of these affirmations, Ward continues: "They could have been written by a devout believer."<sup>4</sup>

Religion is a conduit of a people's "cry and sigh," of their "suffering and protest," as well as the "soul of a soulless world." I see these expressions as helpful definitions of Spirit in the world, as the one who gathers as well as enables the feeling of real humanity amidst difficult circumstances and struggle, as well as in the hope for a better world. British theorist Terry Eagleton has said that Marx was quite critical of religious moralism, but also much in line with his own Judaic heritage as a moral thinker.<sup>5</sup> "Some of the great themes of Judaism – justice, emancipation, the day of reckoning, and history as a narrative of liberation, the redemption not just of the individual but of a whole dispossessed people – inform his work in a suitably secularized form."<sup>6</sup>

### *Experience of Joy and Sorrow*

According to Antonio Damasio, in his book *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*, feelings of pleasure and pain, of joy and sorrow, are foundational to the way in which our brain/mind experiences the world and itself in the world, and even makes sense of the world as it is experienced. We have feelings from myriad emotions and related states. For Damasio, the "principal meaning of the word feeling refers to some variant of the experience of pain or pleasure as it occurs in emotions and related phenomena."<sup>7</sup>

Feelings are normally thought to be intangible, private and inaccessible, and thus difficult to describe or define specifically. As primarily "mental phenomena," science itself has taken long to giving this study its focused attention.<sup>8</sup>

Damasio writes: "Feelings are the expression of human flourishing or human distress, as they occur in the mind and body. Feelings are not a mere decoration added on to the emotions, something one might keep or discard. Feelings can be and often are *revelations* of the state of life within the entire organism."<sup>9</sup> Feelings reveal our own sense of greatness and smallness. While emotions are basically aligned to the body, feelings are aligned to the mind. We have the ability to react emotionally to different objects and events. The reaction is then followed by some pattern of feeling, fundamentally a variation of pleasure or pain.<sup>10</sup> Thus, most basic among feelings are those of joy and sorrow, or comfort and distress; many kinds of emotions translate into one or the other. Likewise, a number of feelings are primordially related to the same two, being themselves instances of either joy or sorrow.

Feelings are mental representations that feed from both bodily sensations and related mental images,<sup>11</sup> which may or may not pertain directly to the body sensation of the moment, and to memories (scenes from the past). As the mind fills up with other pleasurable themes or moments, a new wave of pleasurable feeling flows into our minds and bodies. When your mode is felicitous, you have "adopted a mode of thinking in which images have focus and flow abundantly."<sup>12</sup> Thoughts appear that are consonant with similar themes and memories and with their accompanying emotions.

The content for the feeling is a certain way of representing the body in a particular state, or rather of its perception. The same applies to any feelings whether the feeling is one of sadness or happiness, or feelings of any other emotions or appetites. There are certain "body ways," from actions to reactions, from simple to complex, that accompany certain feelings and emotions. In the case of feelings, there are probably several maps of body states.<sup>13</sup>

There is more that we could say about this topic, but it would suffice to stress how foundational these feelings are for the way in which our minds and bodies work, for being human. Experiences of sorrow and joy, pain and relief, suffering and happiness, in brief and for our purpose, the dynamics of cry and comfort are for us.

### *Challenges to Spirit-talk*

We often confront difficulties when speaking about the Spirit. First, some difficulties have to do with biblical languages. The Scripture uses words and images to speak of Spirit by drawing from natural occurrences and com-

mon sensations. The Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* equally mean “breath, air, or wind.” The Scripture also speaks of Spirit in relational terms, for instance, as Spirit of wisdom, of knowledge, of counsel, etc., or in more abstract ways, such as God’s power and influence, God’s speech, and so on.

Second, another difficulty is that New Testament writings do not seem to share one pneumatology. The views on the Spirit go from its place and role in the life of Jesus (for example, in the Gospels), to charismatic experiences and ecstatic expressions (for example, in Paul’s original letters), to the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture through the public ministry (as in the Pastoral Epistles).

Third, and as theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has written, we have the slow growth of the doctrine of the Spirit during the Patristic era. Among its earliest conceptions were: (a) the Spirit as the communal experience of prayer and worship; (b) the Spirit conceived as the “bond of love” between the Father and the Son; and (c) the strong focus on defining the relationship between Father and Son during the Trinitarian debates. In addition, there was a failure to apply “hypostatic” identity to the Spirit, an identity readily applied to the Son in Christological discussions<sup>14</sup> but making the Spirit into a “third” in power or lesser deity. Another reason for the slowness, and conducive to a certain apprehension, was thinking of the Spirit as an “effluence,” something emanating from God, and thus not quite concrete, returning back to the Father; something basically ethereal in character.<sup>15</sup> This view made it hard to attribute full personality to the Spirit.

Others reasons for the difficulty in speaking of the Spirit have been historical, as in the controversy between the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) churches over the *filioque* clause that has divided Christianity. As you know, this clause was added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, where the Spirit was now said to proceed from both God the Father and Jesus the Son. This view tends to make the Spirit subordinate to both the Father and the Son.

### *Speaking of the Spirit*

Christian tradition has spoken of the Holy Spirit in myriad ways. One, as God’s creating activity. The Spirit is active in creation, creating and forming, nurturing and nursing, sustaining and enhancing life. The Spirit is also the realm or space of novelty; as God herself, it is always doing a “new thing.” The Spirit is God’s active presence, ever available to us, and in our midst.<sup>16</sup> Luther believed that God is a God who moves, and therefore it is because of God’s activity that we actually come to know that there is a God.

Two, the Spirit is life-giving, the Spirit of Life. As we mentioned before, it is spoken of as “breath,” also as a “sigh,” and sometimes as “life” itself. The Spirit is active in the world at large, active in and among humanity, and not only among Christians or in the church.

Third, the Spirit is the Word in action, and its very effectiveness. As we learn from the Scripture, God’s speech is powerful and creative. God’s word is sent and never comes back empty, because it does what it was sent to do in the first place. Linking the inner workings of the Spirit with the hearing of the Word, it is the Spirit that makes possible the reception of the spoken and the written word (Rom 15:18-19). The Spirit is the bringer of the good news (1 Pet 1:12). The Spirit, like the Word, convinces of guilt and enacts forgiveness; makes us uncomfortable and brings consolation; shakes us and grants peace; cries with and for us and comforts us.

### *The Spirit’s Outcry, Groaning, and Sigh*

One key biblical passage for the activity of the Spirit is in Rom 8:14-27, especially 8:15-16, 22-23.

*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 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.<sup>17</sup>*

To be in the Spirit and to be in Christ are basically synonymous for Paul. Christians are led by the Spirit of God. Those of the Spirit are not slaves but children, since those “who are led by the Spirit . . . are not under the law” (Gal 5:18). Life under the law, which is life under fear, that old way of life, cannot be the case any longer for those who are of the Spirit. The Spirit has made possible our adoption as God’s children. It is the Spirit who also now bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And it is that same Spirit now who makes us cry (*krazein* means to cry loud) to God, calling on God as “Father!”

In Paul’s writings, this outcry probably reflects an instance of communal worship; thus it has a liturgical connotation, and perhaps a relation to inspired proclamation, but also the sense of an ecstatic outcry.<sup>18</sup> In a

hostile world, the Spirit enables a collective outcry to God, which opens the community to the peace of God (Rom 5:1) as it has been promised to them. The outcry before God is also a protest against a hostile world. This point aims to clarify that this is not only an inward experience but also an audible cry.

The witness of the Spirit in us and through us is an assurance of our status as children of God, something that is not immediately obvious. The full manifestation and certainty of the children will be yet revealed; but the gift of the Spirit now is its seal. The life of the children is cruciform, and thus we suffer with Christ (Rom 8:17).<sup>19</sup> As Luther would say, cross and suffering become one of the “marks” of the Christian life by which the true community, the church, is also known, to us first and also to the world, at least for the time being, since there is yet a “coming glory,” which not only we but also the whole creation awaits.

Some interpreters have seen in this expression about creation, where creation itself “sighs,” “groans,” and “longs eagerly” (Rom 8:19) something like a “cosmic redemption,” which is also attested in other Pauline letters, such as in Gal 1:15-20. The notion of a cosmos-wide deliverance has generated significant commentary.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, creation’s suffering, its “bondage to decay,” its “subjection to frustration” or “to futility” (Rom 8:20) is a curse from the human condition and predicament.<sup>21</sup> Creation itself needs to be freed from its current servitude.

What matters to us is the apparent close relation between the redemption of the children and the rest of creation: from bondage to freedom, between creation’s “groaning in travail” and our waiting for our final adoption (Rom 8:19-23). This hope for a final adoption is promised now, but awaits its consummation, for which creation itself is like a “prayer companion,” in an “eager longing.” But it is not only creation, since we ourselves are “groaning inwardly,” to which creation itself is a witness. All this “groaning” is made possible only by the activity of the Spirit in us and for us and through the whole of the creation. All of creation (*pasa he ktisis*) groans in labor (Rom 8:22); no doubt this is a reference to creation at large and not merely to the human world (and not merely to Christians),<sup>22</sup> as is confirmed by the following verse (Rom 8:23).

In the meantime, our present suffering shows our weakness while also producing our endurance. The Spirit then is there “to help us in our weakness” (Rom 8:25). Just as hope embraces the Spirit’s work, the Spirit sustains us in our weakness. It is our suffering, and groaning, and waiting that names the hope. And even when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit is there, not only to help, but to do it for us as well. It is like saying that the Spirit has to take the task of praying as “we ought to” into the Spirit’s

own hands.<sup>23</sup> Therefore “the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). How exactly the Spirit does it, we do not know; it still belongs to the non-perceptible and hidden. But we know that we are comforted in this way. What matters is that the Spirit’s intercession speaks to God on our behalf and according to the “will of God” (Rom 8:27).

### *Luther on the Holy Spirit*

Luther had, for the most part, a traditional approach to the Spirit, consistent with Trinitarian and Christological dogmas, but with a few unique emphases.<sup>24</sup> Luther’s views are strongly Christocentric at times, as seen in the controversy over the Lord’s Supper. As he did with other theological questions, Luther placed discussion of the Spirit within the framework of the distinction between the “hidden” (or concealed) God, and the “revealed” one.<sup>25</sup> In this way, he speaks of the Spirit in two basic ways: either speaking of the Spirit in its nature or by its effects. In the former case, there is very little that we can say; in the latter case, what we know of the Spirit is what Jesus has promised and accomplished for us. In either case, it is understood that the main task of the Spirit is to point us to Christ. It is Christ alone that matter the most, after all.

Luther does not deny the inner work of the Spirit in people, but he links that work to the “external means” of grace. Luther was convinced of the necessity of the inner action of the Spirit to make us understand the Word, and he believed that God had established this order. Apart from Word and Sacraments, the search for the Spirit leads us to the “hidden God.” As you may expect, the Spirit makes the Word effective in us through both law and gospel. As Luther says about God, the Spirit has an “alien work” and a “proper work” to perform.

In one specific instance, Luther referred to the Spirit as a “resting place” for God the Father and the Son; it is like saying that the Spirit works where the others rest. The key passage is from Luther’s Christmas Sermon of 1514:

Whereas God is always in motion and at rest ... the Son proceeds from the One who is in motion, [and] the Holy Spirit from the One who is at rest. [T]he Holy Spirit is the end of the emanations of God; indeed, while the One who is moved, i.e., the Son, always flows from the Father, the One who is at rest [the Spirit] always proceeds from both, so then [the Spirit] is bound as moving and as moved.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, we are dealing with metaphorical language. The effects of the Spirit matter primarily in letting Christ be known, received, believed, etc.

Luther was conscious of the role of the Spirit as creator, but also in the transformation and consolation of humans who were lost in their sin. The Spirit mediates God's activity and dealings with the world; the Spirit is present in creation, in human deeds, as well as in the Church's sacramental practices. Luther saw the work of the Spirit as making Christ present and living in the proclaimed Word, while creating faith in people. As Martha Stortz states:

The Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of God within the believer's life. The work of the Spirit, in short, is to present God; the Spirit is the presence of God. Luther sums up the whole of his thinking of the work of the Spirit in Romans 8:26.<sup>27</sup>

The Spirit is God's active presence among believers.<sup>28</sup> For the Christian life, thus, the Spirit is intimately related to prayer, since according to Luther (in the Large Catechism) the Christian life is to be lived by prayer alone. In the Small Catechism, Luther insists that the Spirit calls through the preaching of the gospel and bestows gifts on those who listen.

Speaking of the relation of the Spirit to the Word, we risk treating them separately. When we make a distinction between the two, we do it for the sake of definition and argument. But in fact, Spirit and Word need to be thought mostly together so as to grasp their essential unity more fully. Word and Spirit work together because they do the same work, that of Christ.<sup>29</sup> The Spirit makes Christ truly present among us, proclaimed and acknowledged as the Living Lord of the community of believers. But it is because Christ is the Living Lord that the Spirit has been given to us, bestowed upon us.

### *Luther's Take on the Pauline "Outcry of the Spirit"*

As with many things in Luther's thought, his understanding is intimately related to his conception of faith as well as his critique of works. Bear in mind, though, that most of Luther's comments on this topic are given in the parallel verse of Gal 4:6 rather than in Romans. Let me read it for you: "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: 'Abba! Father!'"

For Luther, this cry is not only a matter of the voice but also of the heart, as made evident in the Galatians passage. The emphasis here is not on the external signs and motions; the cry of the Spirit is not enacted through motions of our own, whether it is a loud voice or barely the motion of the lips; according to Luther, that would be again to rely on one's works.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness, not in our strength. As Luther states in his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*, the Spirit "emits what seems to us to be some sort of sob and sigh of the heart; but in the sight of God this is a loud cry...."<sup>30</sup> In our weakness we can only cling to Christ.

The Spirit does not intercede for us with long prayers; this outcry of the Spirit is, in Luther's words, "indeed a very short word, but it includes everything. Not the lips, but the feelings are speaking here."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, "the Christian ... must believe for a certainty that he is in a state of divine grace, and that he has the cry of the Holy Spirit in his heart, especially when [the Christian] is performing his proper function, which is to confess or to suffer for confessing."<sup>32</sup> The opposite of confessing the faith is to declare uncertainty about the grace of God, which Luther sees as the worst possible offense against God and Christ, basically a disparaging of God's promise.

In the midst of experiencing our weakness, in suffering and trial, the crying and sighing of the Spirit in us calls on God as Father, not as tormentor or judge. A mere external cry, which Luther would see as our own doing, calls God cruel and relies on works. This cry would be our own feeling, not the deep sigh and feeling of the Spirit of God in us and on our behalf.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, and going back to the Romans passage, Luther remarks that the Spirit of God in us casts away all fear. Fear moves us away from God, while "faith expands the heart, the emotions, and the voice." We do not have to fear God or any of the things that God wills for us. However, "this cannot happen unless we have [God's] spirit, so in the same spirit we love the things that [God] loves."<sup>34</sup> Without the work of the Spirit in us, we are incapable of any love for God; our natural tendency would be to resent God. In any case, the Holy Spirit is never the goal or the result of human action.<sup>35</sup>

### *Comfort of the Gospel, Comfort of the Spirit*

For Luther, true comfort for the individual is in Christ's righteousness, this "alien righteousness" that is now imputed to us by faith. The work of the Spirit is the forgiveness of sins. The doctrine of justification itself is "full of comfort," as Luther declares in his commentary on Gal 3:13: "And this is our highest comfort, to clothe and wrap Christ this way in my sins, your sins, and the sins of the entire world, and in this way behold [Christ] bearing all our sins."<sup>36</sup> Comfort is at the heart of faith and the gospel. To illuminate the work of Christ for us is also to strengthen and comfort troubled consciences. Believing in Christ is to find our true comfort and rest in him. The Spirit of Christ now does the work in us, for us, and on our behalf. In the Christian life, remembrance of baptism also serves our consolation, the kind of comfort to the soul provided by the gospel.



The Holy Spirit has been bestowed on us, given to us to be of help, to guide us in our daily lives. The promise of God is that the Spirit will always be present for us, making God's active presence real in our experience. Through the Spirit we are moved from experiences of despair and death to assurance of redemption and new life. In other words, the Spirit leads us from death to life, from loss to gain, from law to gospel, from sorrow to consolation, and from groaning to rest; in brief, from cry to comfort.

## Notes

- 1 In my use of this phrase, I am not aiming at any reference or comparison to Karl Rahner's work of the same title. Rahner's Thomist "metaphysics of knowledge," as crucial as this might be for theological rationality and discourse, is not the concern of this essay.
- 2 *The Portable Karl Marx* (ed. and trans. Eugene Kamenka; New York, NY: Penguin, 1983) 115.
- 3 Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2002) 154.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2011) 158.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 7 Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt) 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 11 According to Damasio, what made the pleasurable feeling possible was the mental representation of part of the body or of the whole body operating in a certain manner. "Feeling, in the pure and narrow sense of the word, is the idea (or thought or perception) of the body in a certain way." *Ibid.*, 85.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 88; Damasio says that the mind/brain "scans" the body on a regular basis, creating maps of the body, which ground mental processes. Bodily experience is the foundation for emotions of different types. The varieties of emotion have a long evolutionary history and are the source and base of our complex experience of feelings (also 12).
- 14 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2012) 10-12.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 16 For more on this point, see Nelson Rivera and Kirsi Stjerna, "Holy Spirit," in *The Lutheran* (May 2012) 18-19.
- 17 All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
- 18 Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 227.
- 19 Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1980) 128.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 22 Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 233.
- 23 Harrisville, *Romans*, 132.
- 24 See discussion in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999) 232-234.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 237-238.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 234, n. 10 [WA 1:20-29].
- 27 Martha E. Stortz, "Let the Spirit Come: Lutheran Interpretation of the Holy Spirit," in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31/3-4 (1986) 317.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 318.
- 29 Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (trans. David Smith; San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986) 130. For Congar, as much as conceptual distinctions matter, dividing the reality of Word and Spirit can be detrimental to any theology (131).
- 30 Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, American ed., 55 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955-86) 26:384 (hereafter, LW).
- 31 *Ibid.*, 385.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*, 388-389.
- 34 *Lectures on Romans*, LW 25:358-359.
- 35 Stortz, "Let the Spirit Come," 319.
- 36 LW 26:279.

*Nelson Rivera has a Ph.D. in Religion from Temple University, is an ordained minister in the ELCA, and is currently Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Hispanic Ministry at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Rivera teaches courses on diverse theological topics, especially on Creation, Christology, Word and Sacraments, Theological anthropology, Lutheran Confessions, and Liberation Theology. His book, The Earth Is Our Home (Imprint Academic, 2010) explores the meaning and implications of evolutionary theory for theological epistemology and philosophy of religion.*

## The Holy Spirit, Spirits and Spirituality: Spirit-filled Guidelines for Transformative, Loving Dialogue

*Kristin Johnston Largen*

In his book on the Holy Spirit, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, says two things in the opening paragraph of his chapter on “The Spirit in 20<sup>th</sup> century interpretations.” He writes first, “the pneumatologies of the twentieth century and the beginning of the third millennium reflect the diversity and plurality characteristic of all contemporary theologies.”<sup>1</sup> Then, a little further in the paragraph, he writes, “There is also a widespread hunger for the Holy Spirit and spiritual experiences among Christian churches and believers.”<sup>2</sup> In the United States, we are experiencing both of these things simultaneously – and, in many situations, jointly; and therefore, it is these twin concerns that shape the thrust of my presentation this morning.

Of course, they are quite different phenomenon: the kaleidoscopic manifestations of some form of “spirit” in a wide variety of different religious beliefs and practices; and the longing for some kind of “spiritual” connection with a higher and greater power; a deepened “spiritual life.” However, in my view, they demand a similar – if not identical – response from Western Christianity: an articulation and understanding of the work and presence of the Holy Spirit that makes possible new ways of thinking, new relationships, and, ultimately mutual transformation.

In this paper, I hope to lay out one such response. By way of introduction, I begin my paper with two “case-studies,” of sorts, the first of which speaks to the diversity of the concept of “spirit,” and the second of which speaks to the hunger for a deeper personal spiritual life.

### *The Ainu*

There are many, many similar examples from countries and cultures all around the world that illustrate the complexity of the concept of “spirit” – and remind Christians that when trying to articulate a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, these different understandings must be taken into consideration. This especially true in traditional African religions, but given my current research interests, I offer a brief example from Japan, in particular, the Ainu, the indigenous people who live primarily on the island of Hokkaido.

Like other indigenous peoples, the world of the Ainu is heavily populated with gods: they are everywhere, and can take physical form in almost anything, including what we would consider both animate and inanimate objects. The word for god and the word for “spirit” are the same – *kamuy*: “it is a generic term for both physical and immaterial entities on the earth who possess abilities superior to those of [hu]man. Specifically, gods can be animals, plants, minerals, or other geographical and natural phenomena that have a place on earth.”<sup>3</sup> Even more unusual to a Western mindset, spirits also can inhabit human-made things, such as tools, kitchen utensils, and hunting instruments.<sup>4</sup>

In short, according to Ainu belief, almost everything in their universe has a spirit. These spirits typically live in their own realm, but they can come into the human realm, disguised in whatever form they choose – and they readily and often do so.<sup>5</sup> For the Ainu, animal spirits are the most important, given their closeness to human spirits, and therefore, they are treated with great respect, especially the spirits of the bear and the fish owl – these are the two most important.<sup>6</sup> Asian brown bears, for example, are considered to be mountain gods (*kimun-kamuy*) in disguise. Ironically for Western sensibilities, the way the Ainu welcome these gods who visit in animal form, is to hunt them and then send them back to the spirit world with a sending ceremony. Part of the purpose of this ritual is to demonstrate that nothing is wasted, so the bones and food remains are “sent back” with respect and gifts.

This understanding of *kamuy* has important ramifications for how the physical world in general is viewed – including the human body. The spirit of any being is what is most “real,” and what endures; it is the spirit that is immortal: the body is merely temporary and disposable. “The Ainu people believe that one’s flesh and bones are nothing but the container of the spirit, which exists for the purpose of living one’s life and will be abandoned after this use.”<sup>7</sup>

What this also presupposes is a belief in reincarnation. Once a person dies, their soul – assuming it is free of attachments and unresolved feelings – departs for the next world immediately, leaving the heart, where it resides,

through the mouth, nose, anus, ears, eyes or navel. When it arrives in the next world, it is guided to the proper womb, where it will be reborn. This process continues indefinitely, and the same process occurs with all spirits and with all bodies, with some restrictions.<sup>8</sup>

Humans and animals die; plants wither; rivers and lakes dry up; volcanoes go extinct; and things end their life cycles. At this stage, their spirits leave their containers. In the case of a human being at death, the soul departs from the body, yet the soul is considered immortal even after flesh decays and bones return to the soil. The spirits are thought to repeat themselves and reincarnate according to their specific species and gender, so for instance, a man will always return as a man and a female cat as a female cat.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, given the close proximity of the gods who are dwelling in the human realm, and their importance in the daily life of the Ainu, there is a wonderful give-and-take relationship between humanity and the gods. Gods can be argued with, challenged, and even required to apologize for not providing protection that a specific offering should have guaranteed.<sup>10</sup> There are expectations on both sides, and when those expectations are violated by either one, compensation can be demanded.

In contemporary situations, then, where there are very different understandings of “Spirit,” Christians are called to a more creative and practical re-examining of our own doctrine of the Holy Spirit, asking what a helpful and life-giving Christian response might be to those whose cultural and religious contexts are very different from our own.

### *The SBNR’s*

The second “case-study” concerns the rapidly rising number of “church-divesting” individuals in the United States. The 2015 Pew Report on the “Changing Religious Landscape in the United States” indicates that “the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing.”<sup>11</sup> Of particular notice here, however, is the fact that of those who have left the organized church, 30% of them still say that religion is either “very” or “somewhat” important to them.<sup>12</sup> The typical name for these folks? “Spiritual but not religious.” The term is used to indicate the fact that while they do not affiliate with any specific Christian church, they believe in some divine power and have a sense of themselves as connected to that power.

One of the most important books written on this in recent years is Linda Mercandante’s *Belief without Borders*. The book is her attempt to survey the beliefs of the SBNR’s using interviews *with* them, rather than studies *about* them. It is a pressing question. She writes, “Although surveys vary on exactly how many Americans now claim no religious affiliation, no one disputes the rapid growth in ‘nones.’”<sup>13</sup> However, what is in dispute is how best to define and describe them. Mercandante herself uses five different categories. First are the *Dissenters*, those who “largely stay away from institutional religion;” she notes that they can be “protesting” dissenters or “drifting” dissenters). Second are the *Casuals*, those who seek out and engage in a variety of spiritual and religious practices only in so far and for as long as they are practically helpful. Mercandante writes that theirs is a “therapeutic” spirituality that focuses on “personal well-being.” Third are *Explorers*, those who have a spiritual “wanderlust” and are on a “destination-less, almost touristic, journey, with no plans to settle anywhere; fourth are the *Seekers*, those who actually are looking for a spiritual home, some with “a spiritual longing they could just barely define or articulate”; and finally, fifth are the *Immigrants*, those who “had moved to a new spiritual ‘land’ and were trying to adjust to this new identity and community” – that is, they were “trying to live in a new spiritual home.”<sup>14</sup> The importance of these different categories of course, even if you don’t particularly like the titles, is the reminder that the larger category of the SBNR contains people who have very different relationships to organized religion, and interface with it in very different ways. They resist easy generalizations, and demand nuanced and careful understanding.

In the course of her research, Mercandante returned repeatedly to the core question, “Why did they [many with whom she spoke] insist on being ‘spiritual but not religious?’”<sup>15</sup> She found there were many different reasons, including that, for many people, it meant that “they were ‘alive’ spiritually, rather than being confined by arbitrary rules, needless denominational identity, dry dogma, and pointless ritual.”<sup>16</sup> Others, Mercandante characterizes under the heading “The Righteousness of Not Belonging.” Many operate out of the assumption that “spirituality is an individualistic pursuit, one that is not necessarily supported – and may even be hindered – by group membership.”<sup>17</sup> For these individuals, joining a specific religion is limiting, and closes off other options.

There are many aspects of this phenomenon that are interesting, but for me, in the context of this presentation, it is the use of the word “spirituality” that is most relevant. Mercandante notes how before the twentieth century, “what people today call ‘spirituality’ was often called ‘piety.’”<sup>18</sup> And, significantly, spirituality went “hand-in-hand” with religion, “designating a variety

of practices that fostered faith, devotion, and connection with God.”<sup>19</sup> In short, spirituality was seen as an aspect of religion, not divorced from it. However, in our current context, the two are being increasingly opposed, often with spirituality touted as something “purer” or “truer,” or “more authentic” than religion, which can be characterized as hypocritical, rigid, and unfeeling. Yet, a precise definition of “spiritual” can be hard to come by, and proves both illusive and deeply subjective. So, for example, spirituality often refers to “the invisible or deeper world” vs. religion as “mundane, material reality.” Another way of opposing spirituality and religion are with the categories “heart-felt” vs. “head knowledge.”

What seems very clear, however, is that for many people in this category, “spirituality” is seen as something very individualistic, concerned primarily with the self – and, significantly, this is viewed as positive. Mercandante writes that the “detraditioning” that happens with those who are rejecting traditional religion creates a vacuum with the “revoking of religious authority in favor of personal decision.”<sup>20</sup> Into the vacuum steps a new ethos, which includes “an impersonalization of transcendence, a sacralization of the self, a focus on therapeutic rather than civic goals, and a self-needs orientation to community and commitment.”<sup>21</sup> In her conclusions, Mercandante notes that this new phenomenon of the “Spiritual but not Religious” is not wholly negative. She argues that many people in this category have important concerns and values to which the church needs to attend: the desire for mystery and awe; the need to care for creation; the importance of a practical morality; and an awareness of and great sensitivity to diversity. However, she also challenges the “inward turn” of many in this group, and the rejection of a group identity. Ultimately, she says, “Separating spirituality from religion is not the answer. At the least, it is an artificial dichotomy. If taken to extremes, it can also make people reluctant to form healthy long-term personal commitments in all sorts of arenas. Yet such commitments are a necessary component of change.... To deal with the magnitude of the problems we face, we need an ‘engaged spirituality’ rather than simply a privatized one. In fact, spirituality actually may be a smaller, not larger, category than religion.”<sup>22</sup> This whole category of people, and this vague but insistent articulation of *something* of a divine, spiritual nature with which relationship is possible, is a very important topic for Christian reflection on the Holy Spirit in today’s context.

### *A Fresh Articulation of a Christian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*

With these twin concerns in mind, I move to the constructive portion of my paper, laying out a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that begins to respond to

the need for theological flexibility and creativity, while retaining theological fidelity and consistency. To do this, I want to offer three characteristics of the Holy Spirit that can help Christians as they seek to interpret spiritual experiences and other religions and with other people; that this, that provide a strong foundation from which to make a Christian exploration of and engagement with different understandings of “spirits” and spirituality. These three characteristics are Trinitarian, “troubling,” and tangible. After a brief word of theological grounding, I will take each of these characteristics in turn.

### *Openness and Flexibility are a Good Thing!*

Perhaps in the context, this particular theological assertion is unnecessary; however, I want to be very transparent about one of the fundamental beliefs that shapes all that follows in this presentation. And that is this: I believe this plurality of interpretations of Spirit and spirituality – this diversity and even this challenge to traditional Christian understandings of the Holy Spirit – is a good thing. Fundamentally, I think it is an opportunity for Christians to see God in a new way, to experience God’s love and grace in a new way, and to have our relationships across boundaries of nation, creed, ethnicity, and age strengthened and deepened. We do not have to raise the drawbridge and dispatch the sentinels. We can be optimistic, open, and enthusiastic, even, about what God is doing among us, what God has in store for us, and how amazing God really is, in all of God’s miraculous works.

And, particularly in the context of interreligious dialogue, a fresh articulation of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit is quite helpful. As Roger Haight writes, “...the doctrine of the Spirit and Spirit-language can help us thread the narrow passage between the traditional demands of faith and a new respect for the autonomous value of other religious traditions.”<sup>23</sup> And, to be clear, this is not only for the sake of the other. Haight goes on to say, “...the Spirit is at work abroad in the religions. Therefore, dialogue with other religions can influence the church: the church can learn new things and be changed by other religions because of the Spirit.”<sup>24</sup> This affirmation undergirds all that follows.

### *Trinitarian*

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be emphasized in any Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that, for Christians, the Holy Spirit is not a free agent. By that, I mean that the Holy Spirit is not just “any” spirit; the Holy Spirit

is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God the Father. And, what this means further is that the Holy Spirit never works alone; instead, the three persons of the triune God always and everywhere work together – all works of God are works of all three persons. Gregory of Nyssa says it this way: “Every operation which extends from God to the creation . . . has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> This was true in creation, when God the Father brought the universe into existence through the Word and the Spirit; this was true in the crucifixion, when God the Father suffered the death of God the Son while God the Spirit bound them together in dynamic love; and it will be true in the consummation, when God the Son will come in fullness and truth, through the power of God the Spirit, to return all things to God the Father. I especially like the way Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen says this, summarizing the perspective of Jonathan Edwards: “. . . everything Christ has to offer us comes from the Spirit.”<sup>26</sup> The church has confessed this reality since its inception, and Kärkkäinen reminds us of the ancient rule, “*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*”; that is, “the works of the Trinity outwardly are indivisible.”<sup>27</sup> Roger Haight notes that Aquinas emphasized the same point, arguing that “when God acts outside of God’s self, the whole or essential Godhead acts, not a single ‘person’.”<sup>28</sup>

Part of the problem with understanding and appreciating this reality, at least in the West, is the word “person”, which has been used to translate the Western *persona*, which comes from Tertullian – [“There are in God ‘three persons (*personae*) who are ‘of one substance’ (*unius substantiae*);”<sup>29</sup> and the Eastern *hypostaseis*, which comes from the Cappadocians [“one being (*ousia*) of God in three hypostases (*hypostaseis*)”].<sup>30</sup> The problem, of course, exacerbated by the Enlightenment, is that “person” suggests an independent individual; and when we apply that concept from human life to the divine life, we immediately conjure up an image of three discrete, separate divine beings wandering around, each of whom can go his or her own way, leaving the other two behind, as it were. One of the main problems with this theological construction is that it invites a high degree of ambiguity in trying to experience and evaluate the work of the Spirit in the world. Without the intrinsic connection to God the Father and God the Son, who is to say where and how the Holy Spirit is at work? All Christians can do is shrug their shoulders and say, “The Spirit blows where she wills.”

In my view, emphasizing the Trinitarian character of the Holy Spirit allows us to helpfully “test the spirits” where they appear. Sometimes I think Christians feel a little helpless in the face of what seem to be spiritual manifestations that they don’t understand; and this helplessness can lead to

theological paralysis – the inability to say anything, or make any concrete judgements or reflections. In my view, this is both an abdication of responsibility and also an erroneous assumption. The fact is, Christians do have a basis on which to engage and even judge purported activity of the Holy Spirit, and stand against the manifestation of evil spirits, including structural powers and principalities.

Of course, I recognize that the whole idea of “testing the spirits” has its own inherent challenges. As Kim points out, are we trying to discern the work of one Spirit, or distinguish among many spirits; and, in doing so, whose criteria are we using? However, she also emphasizes that “. . . for the Christian, the criteria for discernment of the Spirit cannot be other than christological. What defines Christians as Christians is that they understand the Spirit of God to be the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the Bible. This is the only criterion for discernment on which Christians can agree.”<sup>31</sup> If Christ said that he came that we might have life, and life abundant; and if, indeed, Scripture bears witness to the Holy Spirit as the agent of that life, then Christians can safely assert that whatever is contrary to that life, whatever is death-dealing, whatever isolates and violates, is *not* the work of the Holy Spirit. Kärkkäinen articulates this same point using the theology of Jürgen Moltmann. He writes, “Moltmann sees the Spirit of God at work everywhere there is promotion of life, growth, inclusivity, and a reaching for one’s potential; conversely, whatever destroys, eliminates, frustrates, and violates life is not from the Spirit of God.”<sup>32</sup> Only a Trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit makes such a judgment possible.

### *Troubling*

The second characteristic of the Holy Spirit is “troubling,” and, at first glance, this might seem a suspicious word to use in the context of the Holy Spirit – after all, it sounds pretty negative, does it not: who wants trouble? And, do we really want a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that includes the bringing of “trouble” to God’s people? However, I stand by the word, just not in the sense it is often used – that is, something negative. Instead, I want to think about “troubling” in its biblical context – specifically the troubling of the waters: the Spirit stirring up what is still, and bringing life to what is lifeless.

In fact, there are three specific places in Scripture where we see the Spirit “troubling” the waters. The first instance comes in the very first words of the Bible, where we read that “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered



the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:1 NRSV). Commenting on this passage, one Old Testament scholar writes that in the “hovering” or “sweeping” [or I would say, “troubling”] of the Holy Spirit, “God is present and active,” and the verb suggests an “ever-changing velocity and direction, and because God is involved this movement is purposeful. This use of the language of movement rather than static categories ... suggests creative activity in this verse, a bringing of something new out of a chaotic situation.”<sup>33</sup>

The second example, which certainly is theologically related to this one, is the account of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, when, in Miriam’s account of the Red Sea crossing, God drove back the waters with “a blast of [God’s] nostrils” [Exod 15:8]. Finally, and most specifically, is the story of the healing of the paralytic, which takes place in Bethsaida, by pools of water that are “stirred up” – by God or by an angel – and imbued with healing power.

Thinking of it this way, we see how “troubling” actually is another way of describing the work of the Holy Spirit in creation: the stirring of seeds underground and the disturbance of the soil as the sprouts burst through; the tremors and the tearing that accompanies all birth pains; and the watery, wet bursting forth from an egg or a womb that accompanies all forms of new life. In this context we also might think of the “troubling” of the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision, as they trembled and shook, coming together and receiving the breath of life.

The creative work of the Holy Spirit, which is one of the signature activities of God’s Spirit in the world, always “troubles” the status quo, the current state of things, because it inaugurates something new, and it requires change: a letting go of the past, and an embrace of the future. And, make no mistake, this often isn’t pleasant! Humans characteristically do not like change – even when the current situation isn’t working so well, we often cling to it, simply out of familiarity. The Holy Spirit does not allow for such safe conventions; and I would venture to say that we all have experienced the “troubling” of the Holy Spirit blowing through our organized life-plans, calling us to new, challenging ventures. What we know for sure about the Holy Spirit is that she is not safe, she is not boring, and she is not easy! Moltmann also emphasizes this point. He recognizes that human beings often are afraid of freedom – afraid of the costs, the responsibilities, the lack of security. Being free, he notes, often means “living dangerously” – yet this is exactly the life to which the Holy Spirit calls us and makes possible for us.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of this characteristic in the particular context I have established for this paper is the reminder that the church does not know

everything about the Holy Spirit, and always has something new to learn as the Spirit continues to reveal novel aspects of God’s creative work and will every day. As Ellen Davis notes, “whenever we pick up the Bible, read it, put it down, and say, ‘That’s just what I thought’, we probably are in trouble.”<sup>35</sup> What is true about reading Scripture also is true about reading other religions’ scriptures, and talking with others outside the Christian tradition. The Spirit of God cannot be limited to what the Bible tells us. As Plantinga Pauw writes, “The universal edge of the Spirit’s work cuts against the church’s perennial attempts to cage the Spirit, restricting its role to granting a seal of divine approval to the church’s established structures and teachings.”<sup>36</sup>

And, at the same time, the church has a word to offer those outside the church, who are simply seeking some sort of “spiritual” reinforcement for their own self-understanding or plan for self-growth. I would say the same thing to that population: if your understanding of “spirituality” and the spiritual life completely harmonizes with what you already think about yourself, about others, and about your vocation in the world, perhaps you, too, are in trouble – and, ironically, need the “troubling” of the Holy Spirit in your life, too.

### *Tangible*

The final characteristic is, to my mind, one of the most important, and that is the tangible, physical character of the Holy Spirit; and the physical evidence we have of her work and presence. Simply put, the Spirit is not antithetical to matter and the physical world, but instead always works in and through bodies to accomplish the divine will. David Jensen says it best when he declares bluntly, “Holy Spirit seeks bodies.”<sup>37</sup> This, too, often runs counter to Christian understanding, and again, language is part of the problem. Jürgen Moltmann makes clear that Western Christians must be particularly careful in their use of “spirit,” in light of the spirit/body dichotomy we have inherited from Greek philosophy. He writes,

The Greek word *πνεῦμα*, the Latin *spiritus*, and the Germanic *Geist*/ghost were always conceived as antitheses to matter and body. They mean something immaterial. Whether we are talking Greek, Latin, German or English, by the Spirit of God we then mean something disembodied, supersensory and supernatural. But if we talk in Hebrew about Yahweh’s *ruach*, we are saying: God is a tempest, a storm, a force in body and soul, humanity and nature.<sup>38</sup>

Jensen emphasizes the same point: “From the very outset, Spirit is not ensconced in heaven, but seeks others on earth, in the flesh.”<sup>39</sup>

This has important ramifications for not only pure physicality, but for sexuality as well. Jensen does not avoid these considerations, but faces them head on, arguing that “the Spirit embraces sexuality.”<sup>40</sup> I am particularly gratified by Jensen’s emphasis on this point, because sexuality is another aspect of physical existence that is often – and often pointedly – set in opposition to the spirit and spiritual. Speaking about Mary and Jesus’ birth in particular, Jensen writes, “Holy Spirit does not avoid the body, but enters the body of a young woman who bears within her womb the life of the world. Sexuality is not avoided here, but is claimed and blessed by God.... In the incarnation, and in Mary, Spirit rests on sexual bodies.”<sup>41</sup> Another place in Scripture where Jensen sees evidence of this subversive work of the Spirit is in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, “a cultural outsider whose very body is an icon of gender subversion. Spirit manifests a queer presence here, blessing a body that does not conform to conventional sexual expectations. Spirit here proves boundary-breaker.... In the strange movement of Spirit’s grace, even Gentiles and eunuchs are welcome.”<sup>42</sup> Here we see the Holy Spirit not only embracing bodies, but also “troubling” traditional cultural understandings about them – and their role in religious life.

This point has particular relevance for the “Spiritual but Not Religious” in the United States. The assumption that there is some generalized “spirit” floating around in the ether with whom one can have an entirely interiorized, individualized relationship is ruled out by a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Among the serious problems with this interpretation of “spirit” are first, the complete reliance this creates on one’s own interpretation and experience of spiritual presence; second, the disconnect this creates between the life of the spirit and the life of the world; and third, the assumption it promotes that “spirituality” is an entirely individualized aspect of life, that neither requires nor even values community – “life together”.

In our own Lutheran tradition of course, we have one of the strongest affirmations of this reality in Luther’s emphasis on the Sacraments in general, but on the Word and Sacraments in particular, in terms of God’s use of them to be in relationship to us. Looking at the Smalcald Articles, for example, we see one of Luther’s strongest assertions in this regard. After discussing the different ways in which God conveys the gospel to us, Luther writes,

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one [God’s] Spirit or grace

apart from the external Word which goes before ... we must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of [God’s] external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.<sup>43</sup>

Here he is, of course, arguing against the “enthusiasts”, who believed that they could interpret and discern the work of the divine Spirit on the basis of their own understanding and wisdom, without any external manifestation of the Spirit’s presence. He goes on to cite the example of Moses and the burning bush, John leaping in Elizabeth’s womb at the sound of Mary’s voice, and the Old Testament prophets receiving the Spirit through the Word.<sup>44</sup>

Now, while in our twenty-first-century global context we might desire to reinterpret the degree of rigidity of Luther’s understanding, the point he is safeguarding remains important to highlight still today: the significance of the visible, tangible manifestations of the Spirit’s work and presence; not just a vague, intangible *feeling* that rests more on our *sense* of what God thinks and wants, than on God Godself.

This also reminds us of the importance of discerning the Spirit in community.

Without a doubt, the Christian witness testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in community; thus the idea of an exclusively personalized relationship between an individual and the Holy Spirit is unthinkable from a Christian perspective. Certainly, the Holy Spirit reveals herself in and relates to individuals – but that is never the end goal. The Holy Spirit works in individuals not exclusively for their own sake, but for the sake of the community, and for the sake of the world; and this is particularly true in the church. Amy Plantinga Pauw writes, “A central role of the Spirit in Christian community is to bind believers to God and to each other in loving union.”<sup>45</sup>

This relates to the last point I want to make in this context, and that is the understanding of the Holy Spirit as love. One of the most important designations of the Holy Spirit down through the centuries in the Christian church is the Spirit as love – Aquinas even wrote that “love” is the proper name of the Holy Spirit,<sup>46</sup> and God the Spirit as the bond of love between the lover, God the Father, and the beloved, God the Son, also is well known. What requires clarification here, however, is a proper Christian understanding of love. In popular usage, love often is described as a feeling – either romantic or otherwise – that I have for another person, or something else. That is, it is primarily an emotional, internal experience that may or may

not have any outward expression. However, in a Christian context, love means something quite different.

For Christians, love actually has less to do with my personal, individual disposition toward someone, and much more to do with how I treat her – how I act toward her. That is, Christian love is not about feeling warm and fuzzy, but about actions of justice and mercy. When Christians describe the Holy Spirit as love, they are not talking about a little cherub flying around and shooting darts into hearts to make us “feel good” about other people. Instead, the Holy Spirit inspires works of love in us; she motivates and moves us to compassionate action: to healing and feeding, to visiting and listening, to helping and holding. As the power of love in the world, the Holy Spirit inspires bodies to engage other bodies, such that love is manifest among people, nations, and all being.

This relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation as well. It is the Holy Spirit that makes real and tangible in our lives the gift of salvation made possible by Jesus Christ. And so in a doctrine of the Holy Spirit we see, too, how redemption is not a metaphorical or disembodied idea, but rather a concrete reality that affects all of who we are – that affects the whole world. Moltmann says it this way: “We shall not be redeemed *from* this earth, so that we could give it up. We shall be redeemed *with* it. We shall not be redeemed *from* the body. We shall be made eternally alive *with* the body.”<sup>47</sup> That is the work of the Holy Spirit – love made manifest in our lives.

### Conclusion

Even in the midst of all we do not know, and all we still struggle to see clearly about the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, there also is much over which we can rejoice together: so much that is wondrous and glorious that the Spirit reveals of God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine has a famous reflection that he begins with a question directed to God: “But what do I love when I love you?” The beautiful answer he gives is that in loving the whole world – a light, a sound, a perfume and an embrace – he is, at the same time, loving God. Loving creation and loving the world are not two different things, but two forms of the same love. It is the Holy Spirit that makes this love possible; and it is the Spirit that connects these two expressions of love.

Moltmann also offers an answer to Augustine’s question, and it is with his answer that I close. “But what do I love when I love God?”

When I love God I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of all this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me. For a long time I looked for you within myself, and crept into the shell of my soul, protecting myself with an armour of unapproachability. But you were outside – outside myself – and enticed me out of the narrowness of my heart in the broad place of love for life. So I came out of myself and found my soul in my senses, and my own self in others. The experience of God deepens the experiences of life. It does not reduce them, for it awakens the unconditional Yes to life. The more I love God the more gladly I exist. The more immediately and wholly I exist, the more I sense the living God, the inexhaustible well of life, and life’s eternity.<sup>48</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2012) 74.
- 2 Ibid., 74.
- 3 Hisakazu Fujimura, “*Kamuy*: Gods You Can Argue With,” in *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* (ed. William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil; Washington, DC: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, 1999) 193.
- 4 Ibid., 193.
- 5 Hiroshui Utagawa, “The Archaeology of *Iyomante*,” in *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*, 256.
- 6 Shigeki Akino, “Spirit-Sending Ceremonies,” in *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*, 249.
- 7 Fujimura, “*Kamuy*: Gods You Can Argue With,” 197.
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- 9 Ibid., 193.
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- 18 Ibid., 4.
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- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., 237-238.
- 23 Roger Haight, SJ, "Holy Spirit and the Religions," in *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology*, (ed. David H. Jensen; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2008) 56.
- 24 Ibid., 59.
- 25 As quoted in William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville: WJK, 2007) 146-47.
- 26 Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit*, 67.
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- 29 Robert Jenson, "The Triune God," in *Christian Dogmatics* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2011) 1:122.
- 30 Ibid., 1:135.
- 31 Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007) 167.
- 32 Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit*, 86.
- 33 Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, and David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005) 42.
- 34 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992) 103-105.
- 35 As quoted by Amy Plantinga Pauw in "The Holy Spirit and Scripture," in *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology*, (ed. David H. Jensen; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2008) 38.
- 36 Ibid., 31.
- 37 David Jensen, "Discerning the Spirit: A Historical Introduction," in *The Lord and Giver of Life*, 1.
- 38 Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 40.
- 39 Jensen, "Discerning the Spirit," 3.
- 40 Ibid., 4.
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- 42 Ibid., 7.
- 43 *The Smalcald Articles*, in *The Book of Concord* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000) 323.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Plantinga Pauw, "The Holy Spirit and Scripture," 28.
- 46 As noted in Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit*, 41.
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- 48 Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 98.

*Kristin Johnston Larken is Dean of the Seminary and Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Gettysburg Seminary. She is editor of Dialog: A Journal of Theology. Her Ph.D. is from The Graduate Theological Union. Her M.Div. is from Wartburg Theological Seminary. Among Larken's books is Finding God among Our Neighbors: An Interfaith Systematic Theology (Fortress Press).*

## BOOK REVIEW

### Appomattox: Victory, Defeat and Freedom at the End of the Civil War

*Elizabeth R. Varon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)*  
*Reviewed by Leonard Hummel*

Near the conclusion of his *Personal Memoirs* that were hastily completed as he was dying from cancer in 1885, Ulysses S. Grant recalled his meeting with the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1865 – an event that signaled the conclusion of the Civil War.

What General Lee's feelings were I do not know. [H]e was a man of much dignity, with an impassible face .... [M]y own feelings ... were sad and depressed. I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause ...

This portion of Grant's final recollection appears to accord well with a perception prevalent in both his time and ours of the encounter between these combatants at Appomattox and also of the events that followed. According to this view, a peaceful stillness settled upon Grant and Lee as the warring factions under their command subsequently ceased hostilities. A gentlemen's agreement was attained by these generals that offered generous terms to the losers – a charitable surrender without malice. Most pointedly, the political differences that had launched the war were set aside, so that Grant was able to extend empathy not only to Lee and other Confederates but also to their "cause" that had caused the war.

However, that Grant, himself, held a more complicated assessment of Appomattox than this one – and a more critical view of the Confederate cause that was the *casus belli* – is evidenced by his remarks in these *Memoirs*



that immediately follow those cited above: "... though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse.<sup>1</sup>

In her recently published and already highly acclaimed work, *Appomattox: Victory, Defeat, and Freedom at the End of the Civil War*, Elizabeth Varon argues – and, in the opinion of this reviewer, argues persuasively – that conflicting political forces permeated the process and terms of this surrender and also persisted in subsequent disputes about its significance. By doing so, Varon confirms that the events that April at Appomattox were as complicated as Grant later recalled. That is, the ending of the Civil War was itself shaped by and later refracted through political disputes around race, racism, union, slavery and freedom that were its “cause” and that continued after its conclusion. Varon lays out the variety of competing visions of Appomattox and of that surrender’s enduring importance because of these differences: (1) that of Grant and all supporters of the United States who viewed their victory as a magnanimous triumph of the union over wrongful secession from it; (2) that of African-Americans who through the securing final victory on April 9<sup>th</sup> at Appomattox by regiments of United States Colored Troops ensured the surrender of the Confederate Army, and, thereby, guaranteed their emancipation from slavery; (3) that of Lee (and other Confederate supporters) who viewed their defeat as a triumph of United States military and economic might over the right of their “cause” and, therefore, interpreted its somewhat generous surrender terms as warrant for the restoration of power to and racial hierarchy within the South.

In this well-researched work, Varon, the Langbourne M. Williams Professor of American History at the University of Virginia, offers a rich mix of political, military, social and religious history of (1) the events leading up to Appomattox and the negotiated surrender there (“Battlefront”); (2) the immediate reception of that surrender amidst a still warring nation that experienced the added grief of Lincoln’s assassination (“Home Front”); and (3) the promise of freedom betrayed following the surrender (“Aftermath”). In relating this complicated history, Varon also offers a focused narrative of R. E. Lee’s politics and symbolic role in the year following Appomattox that demonstrate his single-minded commitment to the “restoration” of the South to its *status quo ante bellum*. While he was resigned to the fact that slavery could not be among the things restored and while he was too dignified to countenance the overt violence of the Ku Klux Klan and other rowdy groups, Lee did tacitly support the systemic violence of the post-war racial caste system that deprived African-Americans of their civil rights. Thus after having made a careful tour of the South in the year following Appomattox,

Grant judged that Lee had been “behaving badly” in his measured defiance of efforts to reform and reconstruct that society.

Varon indicates that these later differences between Grant and Lee stemmed from divergent understandings of what had transpired in April 1865 at Appomattox. There, Grant had not imposed an unconditional surrender upon beaten Confederates but rather offered a “parole” – whereby they would become non-combatants who, theoretically, could resume warring roles if exchanged for similarly paroled union soldiers – and a variety of concessions for various exigencies brought on them by the war. While Grant understood his lenient terms to have presented the subjugated South the opportunity for free repentance of their wrongdoing, Confederates understood this latitude as permission to re-establish control in their region. Thus, only weeks after Appomattox, Lee reported that, under the terms of this parole, the South might take up arms again if radical reconstruction were attempted.

Most, if not all, African Americans had another take on the events of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1865 that, to a degree, arose from the role of black troops in cementing Confederate surrender that day. Hemmed in at Appomattox for several days, Lee had been badly outnumbered but not so much as he later reported and certainly, by his own estimation and actions, not hopelessly so. Accordingly, Lee simultaneously parried several separate offers from Grant for a cessation of hostilities as he was making concerted efforts to break out and continue the conflict. Lee’s final thrust on the morning of the ninth might have succeeded had not the following intervention by U.S. Colored Troops occurred – as was widely noted, including in this report by a white U.S. soldier:

The [United States] Cavalry was being pushed back rapidly towards the station. The boys were falling, scores of them ... when over the hill a dark column was espied coming down the road in close column at quick time. What relief from the awful suspense! ... We saw courage and determination in their coal-black faces.<sup>2</sup>

The surrender at Appomattox that occurred later that very day assumed in later years a prominent place, along with and sometimes surpassing Juneteenth celebrations, as a memorial day of freedom. And Varon reports that, through his tour of the South in the year following the surrender, Grant’s himself was radicalized in coming to understand that the cause of the vindicated United States included the rights of formerly enslaved African-Americans.

Varon’s focus on this single moment in American history and its immediate consequences falls within a broader corpus of recent literature about

the politics of race and racism in the aftermath of the Civil War. The enduring significance of such issues will be noted at the Civil War Institute of Gettysburg College's Summer Conference in 2016 on Reconstruction & the Legacy of the Civil War

Despite the fact that media outlets have proclaimed the end of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the war, at the Civil War Institute conference the commemoration continues. There is no one date that definitively marks the end of the war, and ending anniversary commemorations in 2015 obscures the close linkages between the conflict and its aftermath. Thus, the 2016 conference, *Reconstruction & the Legacy of the War*, will continue the 150th commemoration by examining linkages between the war years and its revolutionary and violent aftermath.<sup>3</sup>

And the significance of events such as Appomattox were also the focus of the 2016 Symposium of the Seminary Ridge Museum in its program, "Teaching the Confederacy."

The history of the Confederacy is one of the most problematic in American history. The memory of Confederate soldiers and the Confederate armies and the meaning of their experiences in the long term continue to be one of the most vexing problems in public and academic history. This year's symposium on how Confederate history has been taught, notes its impact on American social, political and cultural life and how, in the 21st century, this history can inform our understanding of national identity, politics and race.<sup>4</sup>

What does all this mean for Gettysburg Seminary? Or, to ask a perhaps a more relevant question: what does all this mean for the seminary that Gettysburg Seminary will soon become? Varon's book – and other resources such as the work at Gettysburg College and the Seminary Ridge Museum that, themselves, continue the unfinished work for freedom – offer the once and future seminary at Gettysburg opportunities to consider how it, too, might respond to issues of war/peace, race/racism, freedom/slavery that abide with, among and in us after April 9, 1865 at Appomattox.

## Notes

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- 4 Visit [www.seminaryridgemuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SymposiumInviteW2016.pdf](http://www.seminaryridgemuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SymposiumInviteW2016.pdf).

*Leonard Hummel is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Care, and Director of Clinical Pastoral Education at Gettysburg Seminary. His M.Div. and S.T.M. are from Yale Divinity School. His Ph.D. is from Boston University. He is the co-editor of Gettysburg: The Quest for Meaning: Essays on How we Remember the Battle and Understand its Consequences. Along with Mark Oldenburg, Hummel is the Gettysburg Seminary coordinator for the American Association for the Advancement of Science "Science for Seminaries" grant.*

## POETRY + THEOLOGY

### The Metaphor behind the Metaphor – A Shortcut worth Hunting for

*Katy Giebenhain*

The brokenness metaphor is a problem for me. It conjures up inanimate objects or a physical separation that is different from the pain and dysfunction it generally intends to describe. From broken pretzels (I live in one of the nation's snack-making capitals – pretzel pieces are sold alongside chips and cheese puffs) to dishes, fence rails, pencils, I hear snapping. I see shards. It just feels inaccurate. And I seem to be hearing and reading it everywhere I turn.

Why does this matter? Some images speak more effectively to us than others. Poets and preachers are constantly looking for the right image for the right situation.

What about the ways we do not feel whole, but where “broken” does not quite work? In January, driving by a house with Christmas decorations near the Maryland border, I passed an inflatable Santa drooping onto his front lawn instead of standing plump and cheery. The image struck me as effective both personally and for institutions. Doesn't the slow leak of sustained injustice, or an unhealthy relationship feel like that? We are externally intact. We are not whole, but not broken either. In roadside Santa's case, air is architectural. It is part of what holds him up.

We do not need to wear other people's metaphors. Try them on, but keep searching if you need to. Find the one that fits.

I am not planning to use a blow-up Santa in a poem. But, this will lead me to another, more authentic and specific metaphor I may have overlooked if I had automatically reached for “broken.” Not all images or words need to be shared. We first need to figure out what we are trying to express. This intermediate step can be the difference between a brilliant fit and something ho-hum.

It matters. The work is worth it, because what you are saying is worth it, and because the people you carry the message to are worth it. We need to be good scouts – tenacious and alert – hunting for the metaphors that fit. When you find the right one, it will do great work for you. “A metaphor is a shortcut” the Welsh poet-priest R. S. Thomas reminds us.<sup>1</sup> It gets us there quicker, which is necessary for both poems and sermons. We don’t have time to fumble around. We need to get to it.

Paper has its limits. More than anything in this issue I want to be encouraging about this search. Like a volunteer at a marathon handing out banana halves and cups of water yelling “looking good!” “keep it up!” “stay strong” I want to tell you, all of you, whatever you need to hear to keep going. Sermon-writing can be a grind. *Seminary Ridge Review* cheers you on.

## Notes

- 1 McEllhenney, John G. *A Masterwork of Doubting-Belief: R. S. Thomas and His Poetry* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

## We Welcome our Poets

This issue includes poems by G.C. Waldrep (Pennsylvania), Barbara Crooker (Pennsylvania), Meg Bateman (Scotland), William Kelley Woolfitt (Tennessee), Michael Lewis-Beck (Iowa), Elizabeth Bradfield (Massachusetts and Alaska), Peter McEllhenney (Pennsylvania), Brian Johnstone (Scotland) and Kate Sanchez (Pennsylvania). Book Recommendations are for *River Electric with Light* by Sarah Wetzel, *Playing the Black Piano* by Bill Holm and *0°, 0°* by Amit Majmudar.

## Book Recommendations

### *River Electric with Light*

Sarah Wetzel alludes to many kinds of surfaces and surface tension in her new book. These are real or figurative. The book is comfortable with open questions and a sense of the horizon “the shore I am swimming for and the shore.” What is barbaric? Who is barbaric? She writes of the dry earth, of gravity and vertigo, and plenty of water – from rivers to oceans to fog. She also shows us the surfaces of burned skin, dusty windows, desert rocks, pistachios, limestone paths, skinny jeans, baklava, an old basement map with the borders of Israel, the carcass of a whale, the hand of an old pilgrim.

“A Mirage of Shore” refers to the international sign for dangerous waters on the beach “a stick figure drawn in red, arms raised / above stick figure red waves.” (89) Some of these poems are markers, like these warning signs on the beach. They signal that we should be aware, and that we need to be reminded of it.

Wetzel is a poet and creative writing teacher with an engineering background. On her website she says “My experience living in Israel as an American, as someone raised Unitarian/Episcopalian/Methodist, as someone who continues to stumble through Hebrew, animates my poetry.”

“The Rupture” shows one of her ways of surface layering:

How long can I be quiet?  
When will the other city rise up, turn itself over? Pompeii, Atlantis  
were erased from Earth’s face  
in one day. (31)

A well-crafted collection with a pretty stunning title poem “A Worship of Rivers,” Wetzel’s sense of perspective (*senses* of perspective) is compelling. I would especially like to lift up “Postcards from Gethsemane,” “Rack of Lamb” and a poem about the Makhtesh “What the Kestrel Calls the Canyon.”

Here are the final stanzas of “Revising Prophecy”

The Jacaranda tree will explode  
to blue, branches weighted  
with flocks of evening birds,  
the Judas tree will again wear roped robes  
of red and white flowers.

We'll no longer be together.  
 I make no other claim for you  
 Except to say, *it's only one more horizon.*  
 It's not the end  
                   of anything. (99)

*River Electric with Light* is a To The Lighthouse prize winner. It is published by Red Hen Press in Pasadena, Ca. Visit: [www.redhen.org](http://www.redhen.org) and visit: [www.sarahwetzels.com](http://www.sarahwetzels.com).

### *Playing the Black Piano*

Have you ever eaten something you thought you hated but loved it, because of how it was prepared? Like after years of cafeteria spinach you are presented with an aromatic, freshly-sautéed arrangement with garlic and lemon juice and you don't even recognize the vegetable? The prose poems in *Playing the Black Piano* reminded me of this experience. I find the term "prose poem" irritating. There are mixed, divisive feelings about this form among poets. The collection includes poems in different forms. They are *not* all prose poems, but the late Bill Holm was also an essayist, so I think this contributes to the prose poems being so effective.

Here's something from "Angels We Have Heard on High" and the feeling of belting out the chorus: "The god that deserved that Gloria did not appear to worry about crummy presents, or getting ahead; that god threw open his mouth without squeamishness and let sound come out into the universe." (24)

This collection includes a 9/11 poem I very much appreciate for its light touch "An Early Morning Café." Holm gives the reader room. He does not overdo it. He also has a way of handling details of varying scope, from left-handed piano playing, thistles meeting insecticide, the smell of meringue, the floating body of a Coelacanth to big themes of mortality, gratitude, respect, and the reality of the natural world (check out "The Sea Eats What it Pleases").

Here is the first stanza from "The Weavers"

They play a piano made entirely of string,  
 a tune of whirrs, and clunks, and ratchets,  
 the music gradually turning blue, gray, pink,  
 marked by diamonds, flowers and stars. (39)

Holm has a wonderful feel for time – a sense of the present with echoes of history, such as in "Girl Eating Rice – Wuhan 1992," "Magnificat," "At the Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsós" or "Delos in the Rain." He builds associations which read effortlessly.

In "Food Fight Duet. Sanichton, B.C." he brings us a marvelous dialog. It's like verbal table tennis:

Cree and Icelander duke it out  
 over which morsels from nature



can be taken by mouth.

Says Icelander: "Pickled ram's balls, rotten shark,  
sour flipper."

Says Cree: "Boiled moose nose, rabbit brains,  
raw elk's liver." (10)

And from there it gets more colorful. I heartily recommend *Playing the Black Piano* for those who write sermons. Let it rub off on you. The poems are relevant and skillfully written. A lack of pretension, even when including personal observation, keeps readers at ease. Here's what it comes down to, friends: this is an interesting book that does not waste our time.

Visit Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minn. at [www.milkweed.org](http://www.milkweed.org).

*0°, 0°*

It only takes a few lines to know Amit Majmudar is the real thing. These are from "The Glassblowers of Venice:"

At their furnace they forge the orchid's armor,  
vases that start in softness cousin to liquid  
and end in brittleness no solid acknowledges.  
Among glassblowers, inspiration is a matter  
of controlled exhaling, as it must be for God  
whose whirlwind gentles open the newborn lung ... (19)

*0°, 0°* isn't Majmudar's latest poetry collection, but that does not matter. It is a book you should about. *0°, 0°* is where the prime meridian and the equator cross. This is a poet who pays attention to where things cross, touch, intersect. He is a poet, novelist, essayist and diagnostic nuclear radiologist. It is worth keeping in your library, pastors, because it deals with important stuff – essentials – in a smart, interesting way. "Attention to detail" is becoming a cliché phrase but here you will find it in the very best sense. He will take you from Walter Reed National Military Center to the Alhambra, from the Milky Way to the saliva of a moth. Attention to detail? Yes. In the extreme. And it is extremely good.

We readers know we are in competent hands, and that these are the hands of a self-critical writer. There is an awareness of how things are put together and by whom "You can / Make anything sound predetermined just / By rhyming on it twice..." (23) This book will get you thinking differently about static, cherry blossoms, matter and antimatter.

This book is appropriate to bring to your attention this spring with science and faith at the core of our Spring Academy topics on Seminary Ridge. Here is something else fitting for the Ridge, a stanza from "Elegy for Professor Liviu Librescu:"

*That this is what history sounds like up close,  
that the flight of bullets has nothing to do  
with real flight. Bullets have no wings,  
no hearts inside them the way  
the smallest sparrows and aircraft do. Bullets  
are just shot, and the sky does not love them. (70)*

*0°, 0°* is published by TriQuarterly Books, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill. Visit [www.nupress.northwestern.edu](http://www.nupress.northwestern.edu), and visit his author site [www.amitmajmudar.com](http://www.amitmajmudar.com).

# Prodigal

*Elizabeth Bradfield*

I always loved the prodigal son's story, returned ratty  
and thirsty, embraced having recognized  
the sweet water of home's well. But  
his story is not mine. Aside from one thing,

this love, I was the good daughter: schoolwork,  
babysitting, home before curfew. Now I see  
it is our families, not we, who are returning  
from turning away. Where

did they go? To the sneer of neighbors,  
the clucking of tongues. To the straight  
and married place they'd hoped  
we'd end up, and they waited.

We never came. So they've come  
to find where they left us. Holidays,  
your mother pulls you aside  
to criticize your hair, your shoes, your

short nails. But later, when it's dark  
and the neighbors can't tell who  
is working in the garage, though of course  
they know, she says she's glad you have my love.

And my grandmother, on her eightieth birthday,  
wanted portraits of the families that her daughters  
had made. She told the photographer, in front  
of everyone, to not forget us, you and me,

paired in the spot where my married cousins  
had posed with their children. So there we are,  
on her wall, spotlit, shocked, and grinning.

*"Prodigal" is reprinted with permission of the author from Interpretive Work (Los Angeles: Arktoi Books, an imprint of Red Hen Press, 2008). Elizabeth Bradfield holds an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Alaska, Anchorage. She lives on Cape Cod and works as a naturalist locally and on expedition ships. She is the Jacob Ziskind Visiting Poet-in-Residence at Brandeis University and teaches in the low-residency M.F.A. program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Bradfield's poetry has been published in The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Field, The Believer, This Assignment is So Gay: LGBTIQ Poets on Teaching, The Ecopoetry Anthology and elsewhere. Visit [www.ebradfield.com](http://www.ebradfield.com), Broadsided Press: [www.broadsidedpress.org](http://www.broadsidedpress.org), Red Hen Press: <http://redhen.org> or Persea Books: [www.perseabooks.com](http://www.perseabooks.com).*

# The Walled Orchard

*G.C. Waldrep*

I went in by the gate. I had permission; I was a guest.  
 The wall was higher than a man.  
 Inside were the sad stalks of someone's kitchen garden  
 and, at the far end, the orchard itself.  
 Spindly trees, some ancient-thick at the base,  
 others thin and weathered like bone, all lichen-  
 covered. The sign on the door read  
 "Please keep this gate closed to prevent  
 foxes from entering the orchard." I closed the gate, I  
 made sure it was latched. To keep out the foxes,  
 if that's what the sign said.  
 It was autumn, and the sky was luring,  
 the sky was slate-green like something that had been  
 live turning to something live again.  
 There was a green smell, even beneath the chill.  
 I walked about on the wet green grass.  
 There were two hives, one of them quite active  
 in spite of the rain, the wind, the lateness  
 of the season, the other lazy, if not quite dead.  
 I stood still while the bees from the more active hive  
 flew around me. They buzzed my skull  
 and flew into my beard. And then back out again.  
 I thought some about the apples. I was at perfect  
 liberty, I was a guest – a paying guest.  
 The first was sweet and winery.  
 The second was bitter, so bitter that after two bites  
 I hurled it into the wall's east shadow.  
 The third I photographed before I plucked.  
 Although golden it tasted unripe, the way unripe  
 apples always taste, like transgression  
 or its aftermath. I ate it anyway. I chewed its flesh  
 and when I was done, I tossed the core  
 over the wall. All of this took only a few minutes.

And the sky pressed down, although the rain  
 which was forecast to be heavy  
 withheld itself. Some of what we take into ourselves  
 becomes ourselves, and some is cast out  
 ("into the draught," as the King James puts it).  
 When faced with the two hives – the active hive  
 and the lazy hive – I had done  
 what the flesh told me, which was to stand very still.  
 There was no prayer as there was no choice.  
 In truth, it was only the third apple I regretted.  
 Within the walls: orchard, fruit, bees,  
 man. Outside the walls: the foxes.  
 I re-latched the gate carefully when I departed.  
 And it seemed like a final gesture, although it wasn't.  
 The body bears its own fox-trace:  
 the hand of the warder, the hand of the thief.  
 See how the bones green in their fleshy leaven.

*G.C. Waldrep's fifth collection, one long poem called Testament, is available from BOA Editions. A former NEA Fellow in Literature, his BA is from Harvard University, his Ph.D. is from Duke University, and his M.F.A. is from the University of Iowa. His work has appeared in Poetry, Ploughshares, New England Review, Harper's, Boulevard, and elsewhere. Waldrep lives in Lewisburg, Pa., and teaches at Bucknell University. He serves as Editor-at-Large for The Kenyon Review, and as Editor for Bucknell's literary journal, West Branch. Visit [www.boaeditions.org](http://www.boaeditions.org).*

## Ceòl san Eaglais

*Meg Bateman*

'S toil leam an coitheanal a fhreagras gu greannach,  
dòchas a' dìosgail tro bheathannan doirbhe,  
's toil leam còisirean ghuthannan geala,  
solas a' lionadh àiteachan dorcha;

Aach is annsa leam an coithional nach seinn ach meadhanach –  
an seinneadair nach buail air na puingean àrda,  
an tè a cheileireas os cionn nan uile,  
an t-òrganaiche a thòisicheas air rann a bharrachd;

Oir 's ann an sin a thèid an gaol a dhùbhlanachadh,  
eadar àilleasachd is dìomhanas is breòiteachd dhaonna,  
's ann an sin ge b' oil leam a nochdas am beannachadh –  
am fios nach eil lorg air ceòl nas binne.

## Music in Church

I like a growling congregation,  
hope creaking through difficult lives;  
I like choirs of bright voices,  
light filling dark places;

But best I like indifferent singing,  
the soloist who gets the high notes flat,  
the warbler who makes herself heard over all,  
the organist who embarks on an extra verse;

For here is the greater challenge to love,  
amid fastidiousness, vanity, human failing;  
here, in spite of me appears the greater blessing,  
on finding love sweeter than any singing.

*The poem "Ceòl san Eaglais"/"Music in Church" is reprinted with permission of the publisher from Soirbheas/Fair Wind by Polygon, an imprint of Birlinn (Edinburgh: 2007). Meg Bateman studied Celtic at Aberdeen University and completed a Ph.D. in medieval Gaelic religious poetry. She then taught Gaelic at the Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Her Gaelic poetry has appeared in anthologies such as Other Tongues and Twenty of the Best. Bateman has also translated Gaelic poetry into English in An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets and The Harp's Cry. She is a Senior Lecturer at the Gaelic College, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, on Skye, and an Honorary Senior Lecturer in the School of English at the University of St. Andrews. Visit [www.birlinn.co.uk](http://www.birlinn.co.uk).*

## Acts of the Apostles

*Peter McEllhenney*

*I know you're a preacher from your black coat,*  
 The lady said and I smiled and told her *Almost.*  
 To what strange lands might we fly if I spread  
 My black wings, from what strange texts might  
 I speak if I took the pulpit? Would I please her  
 Dancing my exuberant heresies on the Rock of  
 Ages? Perhaps. Her face said she might take  
 My mysteries for faith, my wonders for reasons,  
 My beauties for redemption. She might grant me  
 A God who is all whirlwind and no ash heap, who  
 Suffered so He could say *We are the same now.*

Or would she ask me *What about love dear?* and  
 Smile at my blank look. Love is simple as a child.  
 You shuffle Her to one side with your words and  
 Your rules and your thinking. Then I would sweep  
 Off my preacher's coat and settle it on the majesty  
 Of her stooped shoulders.

## How The Day Began

I dreamed I was young and could sing. My  
 Voice not this three-note croak but mighty  
 Sound and how easily my soul soared from  
 My lips into the vibrant air. Then I woke up  
 And I was old and had no song, just these  
 Words, grey dawn and no soft sleep again,  
 Grief so strong that even I thought the old  
 Coconut of my heart would split and spill  
 Its little milk. Outside, the trees in shadow  
 Were mystery and the traffic noise mystery;  
 Mystery my hands and mystery my teeth;  
 Mystery the tasks of the day and mystery  
 All the days gone in mourning. The radio  
 Broke into a pitch and I rose to silence it.  
 Might be a cup of coffee is the fix? And  
 I heard in my mind my grandmother say  
*No complaining* and my father *Find a use.*  
 My mother said *Be kind* and my wife said  
*Remember your mother.* God said *I made*  
*You a soldier who goes to war with himself.*  
*Call Me Son of a Bitch and ask My blessing.*

*Peter McEllhenney is a writer living in Philadelphia. His work has appeared in Philadelphia Stories, The Apeiron Review, and Blast Furnace and is forthcoming in Referential Magazine. He blogs at [www.PeterGalenMassey.com](http://www.PeterGalenMassey.com).*



## Book of the Dead

*Bruce Bond*

Then they placed the scrivener's heart in one pan  
of the balance, a feather in the other,  
to see if he was light enough for heaven.  
Or so says the myth without an author.  
But it must have been the stuff of one fate  
once, one man's conscience, measured there,  
whose heart spoke to the hearts that followed.  
Did it change things, I wonder, the fear  
that blew through the body of the dreamer.  
Did he speak more soft, act more pure,  
to think some dog of justice eyed the burden  
in his chest. Or did he let the monster in,  
feather the air with words that were, and are,  
no man's alone. Or none a man remembers.

*Bruce Bond is the author of fifteen books including, most recently, For the Lost Cathedral (LSU, 2015), The Other Sky (Etruscan, 2015), and Immanent Distance: Poetry and the Metaphysics of the Near at Hand (University of Michigan Press, 2015). Four of his books are forthcoming: Black Anthem (Tampa Review Prize, University of Tampa Press), Gold Bee (Crab Orchard Open Competition Award, Southern Illinois University Press), Sacrum (Four Way Books), and Blackout Starlight: New and Selected Poems (LSU). He is Regents Professor at University of North Texas. Visit <http://lsupress.org>.*

## The Weight

*Brian Johnstone*

Kato Zakros, Anastasi 2013

She carries within her a weight  
neither large nor small, just  
exactly the size of itself;

the size of a childhood spent  
in his steps, shoes that bit bigger,  
height a span more;

the size of a brother, first  
to that risk, that chancy return,  
first to make ways for himself;

and knows that the mention  
of merely his name, the date  
of his name day, the night

that he crashed is enough  
to dredge depths of her grief  
she will recognize, even

if not plumbed before;  
knows that for her the *Anastasi*<sup>1</sup>  
always is soured: a locked door,

shut window, an unbroken loaf;  
knows the last words he heard,  
someone's *chronia polla!*<sup>2</sup>

only deepen her hurt,  
like a jest, a cruel twist  
of her loss: a stone

in the grain sack to bolster  
the weight; flour cut with chalk,  
ever bitter to taste.

<sup>1</sup>Greek resurrection celebration

<sup>2</sup>Greek Easter greeting: "many years!"

## Given

This branch to which I take  
the running chain

is dead in that one sense  
we cling to stubbornly,

believing stasis, dehydration  
mark the loss of life;

dead the way no beech or ash  
can ever be

set moving by the winds  
that brought this limb to earth,

that aired it for a year  
and made it ready for the saw

to section it,  
the axe to split it into twins

whose life is kindled once again  
in winter grates

that spark, spring into being,  
wrest it back in flame,

and grow it, given  
earth and ashes, given time.

*Brian Johnstone is a well-known figure on the Scottish poetry scene with six books to his name. He is the poet/reader with Trio Verso, also featuring Richard Ingham (saxes, bass clarinet) and Louise Major (bass). Winner of many prizes, Johnstone is a founder and an honorary president of StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival. Among his new projects is Scotia Extremis, an online poetry anthology co-edited with Andy Jackson including over 130 participating poets. Visit <http://brianjohnstonepoet.co.uk> and [www.arcpublishings.co.uk](http://www.arcpublishings.co.uk).*

# Changeling

*William Kelley Woolfitt*

1902: Beni Abbés, Algeria

I dream the rat snarls, skitters  
through the rotten orange  
flesh of the pumpkin that slid

from my hands, splatted  
on the chapel floor. I wake  
to the Cinderella life.

My visitors ask for barley, calico,  
medicine, lodging, lost property.  
As the door shudders, creaks,

swings open, I sweep out  
the sand that gusts back in  
all the broken day. My work

is to pray, serve, sweep, scurry  
to the door, split and portion out  
whatever is dear, breakable,

surplus – to soldiers, travelers,  
beggars, slave hunters, runaways,  
slave boys and girls, sons

and daughters kidnapped from Chad,  
Tuat, Sahel. Each of us is a changeling,  
certain to shrink and curl

like twists of burnt paper,  
unless kindness reaches through  
our lizard scales and mouse fur,

bidding each to grow, unfurl,  
roam the earth as an enlarged  
and marvelous creature.

*William Kelley Woolfitt is Assistant Professor of English at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. His first book of poetry, Beauty Strip, won the Texas Review Breakthrough poetry contest, and his second book, Charles of the Desert, a biographical cycle depicting the life of a French hermit-missionary to Algeria has just been published by Paraclete Press. "Changeling" is included in Charles of the Desert. His poems appear in a wide variety of journals as well as thirty-five short stories. Woolfitt is editor of the blog Speaking of Marvels. Visit <https://chapbookinterviews.wordpress.com>, and visit Paraclete Press [www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com).*

## Interlinear

*Barbara Crooker*

(two poems from the manuscript *The Book of Kells*)

Let's praise the agile animals  
that flit here and there in the Vulgate text,  
who can wedge in small spaces: the moth  
in initial P, antenna flickering outside the line.  
Or the monk on his horse, trotting right off the page.  
Look, there's an otter, his mouth full of fish, and here,  
a blue cat sits watchfully by. A gorgeous green lizard  
slithers in the text, 72r, while a wolf pads his way  
through 76v. It's a whole barnyard: chickens and mice,  
hounds and hares, snakes, eagles, and stags. Animals  
as decoration. Animals as punctuation. Things seen  
and unseen. So let us praise all of God's creatures,  
including the small and the inconsequential, all of us,  
interlinear, part of the larger design.

## Four Men Pulling Beards

*folio 188r*

Two men face each other,  
left arm under right leg over  
right arm, each pulling the beard  
of his counterpart. And this is  
repeated by his friend:  
under, over, yank. Beneath  
them, two more men, the exact  
same knot of arms and legs. Oh, what  
tangled webs we weave. Is this  
friendship, or an age-old quarrel?  
One thing is certain: no one  
wants to be the first  
to let go.

*Barbara Crooker's poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies. A forty-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and five-time nominee for Best of the Net, her books are Radiance, Line Dance, More, Gold, Small Rain and Selected Poems. Her poetry has been read on the BBC, the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Company), The Writer's Almanac, and American Life in Poetry. She has read her poems in the Poetry at Noon series at the Library of Congress, in Auville, France, at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, and many other venues. Visit [www.barbaracrooker.com](http://www.barbaracrooker.com) and, for her latest collection, visit [www.futurecycle.org](http://www.futurecycle.org).*





Though the man's cheeks are pressed into plaster,  
marigolds fall from his pockets.  
His voice – *te de canela con cana de azucar* –  
greet them with Styrofoam cups,  
the way his mother would welcome strangers  
into her home.

*Kate Sanchez was Poet Laureate of Hanover, Pennsylvania, from 2010-2011. She received her M.F.A. from Columbia College Chicago. Her work has been published in The Columbia Poetry Review, Apiary, Fledgling Rag, Stillwater Review, The Evening Sun and Tongvas. Sanchez teaches creative writing, literature and composition at the Community College of Philadelphia.*

## GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

## How Do We Make Our Way Back?

*John Spangler*

From what surely must be a low point in the American quest for dignified and substantive debate in democracy, the question pressing for me of late is “how do we make our way back” from such a nadir? It wasn’t enough to falsely accuse Mexican refugees of perpetrators of violent crime. It wasn’t enough to suffer the emptiest insult to a female candidate’s appearance. It wasn’t enough for multiple candidates to advocate for and commit openly to order war crimes in military and foreign policy. And it wasn’t enough to call for the ban of all Muslims from entering the United States, pasting all of Islam with the evil intentions of extremists who do not represent the faith. Candidates debased themselves and the American people with a rhetorical display that could not easily be discussed in polite company.

So I wonder, what brings us back from such a point? How do we recover from this onslaught in which anger substitutes for passion, vulgarity for courage, and insult for substantive critique? What is the antidote to seeing our public discourse hit rock bottom? Besides the obvious answer of “get some new candidates,” the question has dogged me because it feels as if the whole conversation can be dragged down by one practitioner.

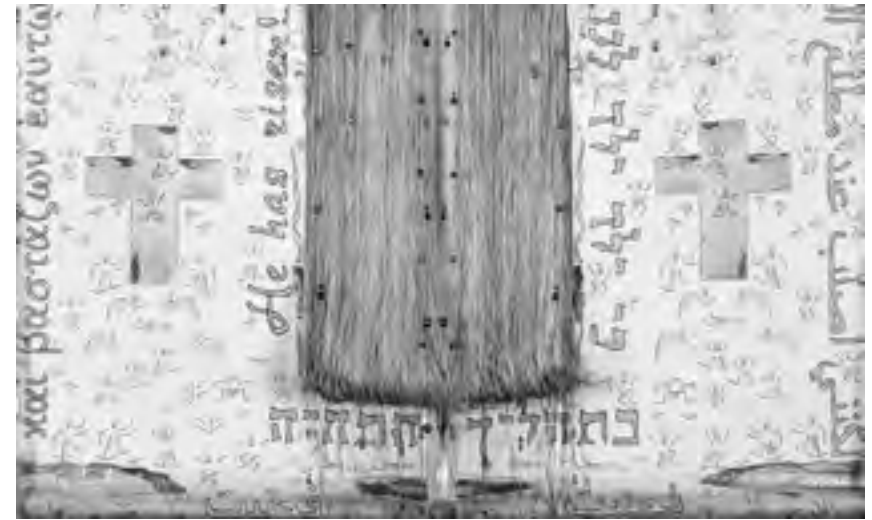
It turns out that the answer is all around me. In Lent, I usually pull out the recordings of Bach’s Passions (both St. Matthew and St. John), and this year, adding Mozart’s Requiem to the mix because the Seminary’s sponsored concert series will include it with the Schola Cantorum of Gettysburg performing with the Gettysburg Chamber Orchestra later this spring. Another clue was my impulse-purchase of the kind of book I never give any thought to – an anthology called *75 Masterpieces Every Christian should Know* by Terry Glaspey.<sup>1</sup> Her subtitle claims that she reveals the “fascinating stories behind the great works of art, literature, music and film.” More about this book later.

So the answer turns out to be found in the world of fine art. It helps lift our horizons, helps probe what it means to be a human being in creation, helps explore the faith in the human experience and the overarching questions of suffering and love, grace and pain, truth and beauty. Several moments along the campaign trail taught us that you cannot mock vulgarity, or scold it, or challenge it without dragging yourself down into the muck. But let works of art speak. Speak about the art and the way art often enhances our understanding of texts and truths, representing more profound expressions of creature and creator.

In the momentary entanglement of the pope in the American political primary struggle, he pointed to the metaphor for his office (pontiff = bridge) opting for bridge-building instead of walls. "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel," the Pope told journalists who asked him about the American political figure displaying a fetish with walls.

The world of art expands our understanding of important and familiar texts. The lectionary for this most recent Lent gave us the prodigal son story, moving Christians across the centuries with the multi-layered parable from Luke, inspiring Rembrandt to paint it, and more recently moving Dutch priest and spiritual writer Henri Nouwen to produce a meditation on it. Eventually, the somewhat nomadic Nouwen wrote a small monograph entitled *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (1992) using the biblical parable and the painting as his text to himself and us find a graceful way home. Rembrandt, a true master of light and shadow, becomes both prompt and guide to Nouwen in grasping the breadth and depth of this text and the implications of the homecoming. The painting renews interest in the overly familiar text, brings a fresh angle of view, and helps the faithful in their own sojourn of quest and return. And I should add that you can also read about Nouwen's emotional connection to the Rembrandt work in Glaspey's *75 Masterpieces* (see page 109ff.).

The intricate, but book-based sibling relationship among Christianity, Islam and Judaism was on full display in an exhibit of Laurie Wohl's "Birds of Longing" in late 2014 at the Seminary. The textile pieces in the exhibit integrated Muslim, Jewish and Christian poetry and spiritual texts from the period of the Convivencia in Spain (eighth through fifteenth centuries) with contemporary Middle Eastern poets, particularly Palestinian and Israeli. Wohl describes her "Unweavings" as "fiber art pieces [that] convey spiritual narratives through form, color, texture and calligraphy." Her work, she said, "alludes to the oldest traditions of narrative textiles, but in a completely contemporary idiom." Wohl's work, and that of scores of active artists represent the simple bridge-building capacity of the arts. The work of the



Detail from Laurie Wohl's "Carrying the Sun." In her "unweavings" Wohl juxtaposes Hebrew, Greek, Arabic and English, "tying" these traditions together, allowing one to flow near and out of or into the other.

Seminary's Fine Arts Council is to make sure that the bridge connects properly to the land.

Without intending to redress the worst of the campaign rhetoric, artist Tom Hyatt will bring skills to bear on an exhibit for April and May of this year inspired by the Poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca and the familiar form of wooden sculpture of Latin America. Hyatt works for Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in technology, but in this exhibit bridges the divide between North and Latin America, works with the religious figures, and the work of an avant-garde Spanish poet. His work anchors the cover of the current issue of this journal, and depicts memorable impressions from his travels in Ecuador, the land where his mother lived originally.

In his own words, he comingles Lorcas' work with the three dimensional carving tradition of Central America, now to the point where "I no longer am able to (or want to) know what is coming from where." The bridge-building work of art reduces the distance between ourselves and the unfamiliar, making it impossible to support walling off an entire nation, or an entire faith group. The artist opens herself or himself to influences, with mind open, and values what she or he sees across the boundaries. Hyatt develops sympathy for what he saw in Ecuador, the statuarities and memorials. He incorporates human figures, explores suffering and some rituals of dealing with death. It is difficult to embrace cultures, stories and symbols and then devalue their people, their motives and immigrant presence. If it



Tom Hyatt borrows and synthesizes images and symbolism from otherwise disparate places and cultures. A detail of Guachalá is on the cover of this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*.

functions as an inoculation against prejudice, insult and dishonor, then I would hope that it would provide a set of cairns for the way back to humane living, to human decency.

After leading the prayers of the faithful in a recent worship service on a Sunday morning, an individual in a local congregation developed “concern about a part of the prayers” in which a petition prayed for a Muslim community in Indiana where an Islamic Society facility was vandalized with violent and obscene graffiti. The concern was not expressed directly, so it is not clear how widely the question “why are we praying for Muslims? they are our enemy,” spread among the assembly. This sentiment is by all measure

isolated and small within the congregation, but it represents a growing and more visible and audible segment of the broader population. And poses the challenge for how we frame such issues in our ministries.

### *How? Where to start?*

Glaspey’s *75 Masterpieces* offers a great place to begin if you feel unacquainted with the arts and don’t know where to begin. Glaspey explores in brief, pithy format the paintings, novels, musical works, poetry, film and architecture that speaks to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian. And the author has chosen works that, while popular and often well known, are not always top-of-the-mind familiar, with the goal of identifying those works that have enduring value. The essays are not comprehensive, but stimulating enough to get started in study, guiding a Christian education study series, pointing in good directions. Some are quite accessible to me (*Amazing Grace*, *At Folsom Prison*), and others less so (*William Blake*, *Austen’s Pride and Prejudice*). You will have your own standards of judgement.

A next step is to find the artists in the congregation or community who are practicing their God given gifts and who may have been on this journey back to beauty and truth long enough to offer good guidance. There are organizations that help connect those Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA or more directly: [www.Civa.org](http://www.Civa.org)) and offer a register of traveling exhibits ready for scheduling. Subscribe to the journals *Image: Art, Faith, Mystery* or *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* to read and follow the creative spirit.

Finally, search out and find the modern day Nouwens, whose ability to take texts and make them visible to the rest of us. Preachers who can create pictures with words are valuable and helpful to me. I know several and have enjoyed the privilege of hearing those who are colleagues in the Seminary’s orbit preach frequently in our chapel. Then there are the artists who can make the music of sacred texts, the Mass in B Minor, the Requiems, and all the soaring tones that give us back the joy of God’s gifted creation. There must be other paths, and additional sources to help us make our way back to human decency, or to help others seeking their way. If you have thoughts, please share them with me, for I am “all ears.”

### *Notes*


- 1 Glaspey, Terry, *75 Masterpieces Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).
- 2 Nouwen, Henri J.M., *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image Books / Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994).

Works Inspired by the Poetry of  
Federico Garcia Lorca and  
Wooden Sculpture of Latin America

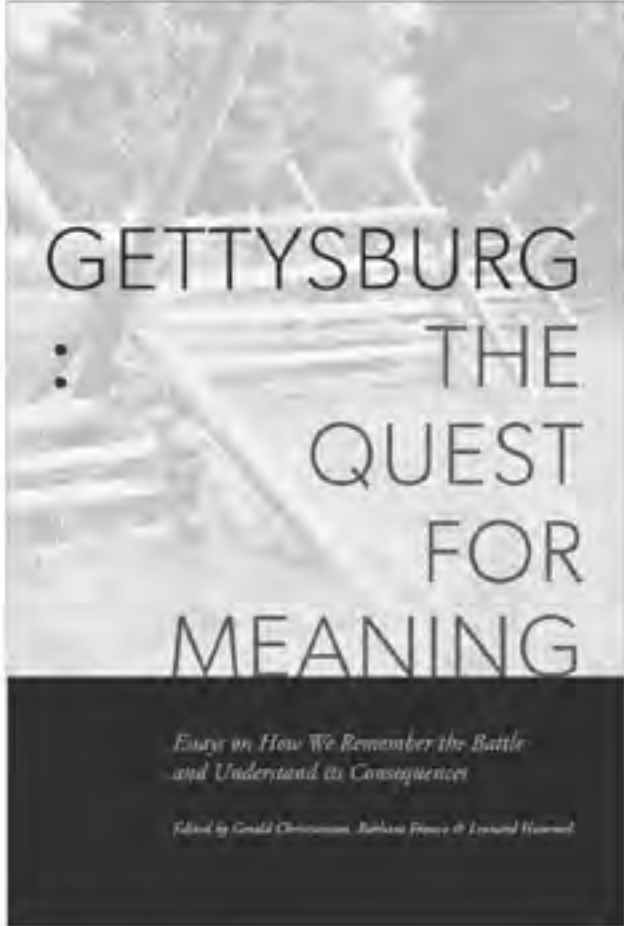
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