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# Luther on Reason: What Makes a Whore a Whore

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# CONTENTS

- 1 Luther on Reason: What Makes a Whore a Whore  
*Jeffrey K. Mann*
- 18 The Significance of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton for Lutherans on  
the Eve of 2017  
*David von Schlichten*
- 34 Hospice Chaplains: Presence and Listening at the End of Life  
*Charles J. Lopez, Jr.*
- 48 Paul R. Hinlicky's Transubstantiation of Christian Doctrine and  
Glorification of Christian Philosophy  
*Charles W. Peterson*
- 75 Heritage and Hate: Definitions of Nostalgia and the Confederate  
Flag at Gettysburg Seminary  
*Martin Otto Zimmann*
- 91 O Taste and See that God is Good  
Memorial Homily for Salud Galapia Nieting  
*Michael Allwein*
- 94 I am the Younger Son  
*Mark Oldenburg*
- 98 Book Reviews on  
*Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers* by  
Michael L. Long and *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical  
Tradition* by Roger E. Olson and Christian T. Collins Winn
- 106 Poetry + Theology  
*Up to Our Armpits*
- 134 Gettysburg Seminary Fine Arts  
*The Powers of a Flag*

# Luther on Reason: What Makes a Whore a Whore

*Jeffrey K. Mann*

At first glance, Martin Luther's attitude toward human reason seems ... well ... unreasonable. He did, after all, repeatedly refer to it as a "whore."<sup>1</sup> He also, quite famously, derided this human capacity by speaking facetiously of "*O domina Ratio*" ("Madam Reason") in his polemics against Erasmus.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, academic treatments of the subject usually begin by pointing out that Dr. Luther was no enemy of reason. He was not an uncritical fundamentalist who blindly accepted the biblical text without rational thought, even if he sounds to us a bit like that from time to time. To imagine him as such is to place him in a category that did not even exist in the sixteenth century.

More recent scholarship has focused on the philosophical sophistication of the Father of the Reformation. To refute the "irrational Luther" argument, one need only look at the collection of essays by leading scholars in *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*,<sup>3</sup> with its three sections addressing Luther's own philosophical education, his impact on continental philosophy, and his influence on philosophy still today. Luther was a rational thinker *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup>

As is generally pointed out, Luther held natural reason in very high regard, describing it in *The Disputation Concerning Man* [1536] as "that most beautiful and most excellent of all things."<sup>5</sup> It is capable of remarkable achievement in worldly matters, from economics to industry and music. In the realm of theology, it certainly has an important role to play as well. It must, however, remember its limitations – most often discussed as its inadequacy and pride. Human reason is incapable of deducing the Trinity from nature, even if it can reason *about* this divine self-revelation. And its pride

often leads it to take the place of the Word of God, creating and insisting on new works or doctrine.

But a “whore?!” That seems a bit much. What is it that made Luther consider reason a “whore?” He clearly appreciated hyperbole and crass invective, but he did not throw out this particular slur as a general insult for things and people he did not like. His choice of words here was quite deliberate. For Luther, there is indeed something problematic about reason beyond its inadequacy and pride. There is an adulterous disloyalty in human reason that Luther identified, and that we must recognize if we are to understand Luther correctly.

This article will consider why Luther used the specific word “whore” for human reason. In doing so, we will correct the inadequate notion of Luther as an enemy of reason, but more importantly, we need to recognize that Luther’s difficulties with reason extended beyond its natural limitations and hubris. We will then conclude with a brief consideration of why this matters still today, and what Christians should be taking away from this admittedly odd denunciation.

### *Human Reason: The Good*

When it comes to matters of governance and the management of this world, there is nothing greater than human reason. In fact, there is no tool other than reason to determine matters of politics, economics, science, industry, and education. For Luther, proper conduct of such disciplines is not prescribed in the scriptures; fortunately, we are graced with the benefits of natural reason.

[I]t is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine. It is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicine, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life.... It is a sun and a kind of god appointed to administer these things in this life.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul Althaus explains in the chapter on “Reason” in his *Theology of Martin Luther*:

Within this realm, however, that is, within ‘earthly government’ in the broadest sense in which Luther can use that term, reason alone is the final authority; it contains within itself the basis for judging and deciding about the proper regulation and administration of earthly

matters .... In these matters the Bible, Christian preaching, and theology have nothing to say. Holy Scripture and the gospel do not teach us how to make right laws or administer the affairs of state. This is all a matter of human reason which as such was originally given to men by the Creator.<sup>7</sup>

It is for this reason that Luther could recognize that, without the Christian scriptures, other civilizations could manage their affairs quite well. “And, to tell the truth, [the heathen] are far more skillful in such matters than the Christians.”<sup>8</sup> He believed the articulation of virtues and the conduct of civil righteousness are not the purview alone of those who possess Holy Writ, but were found in great abundance among the Greeks.

This is not to say that Jews and Christians have no advantages that stem from their knowledge of scripture, and Luther himself preferred to live in a Christian nation. Luther extolled the Golden Rule and believed it must be applied in economic matters,<sup>9</sup> which led to his rejection of usury and price-gouging. Gen 1:28 is an important reminder to be good stewards of the earth, even if it does not tell us how to vote on cap-and-trade. The Bible provides general ethical obligations, but reason is the tool we have to determine the best public policies.

In the realm of theology, Luther also recognized the place and importance of reason. Human beings have been provided with natural reason, with which we can determine right from wrong. He believed us capable of determining the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence of God.<sup>10</sup> While this rational capacity is compromised by original sin, it retains sufficient integrity to lead us to fundamental truths about the nature of the divine. The capacity of the human mind for logical reason is handicapped but not left impotent. Indeed, logical argumentation played a tremendous role in the theology of Luther – not just for faith seeking understanding, but to lead one from truth to truth – from revelation to orthodox theology.

The most well-known case of Luther castigating Madam Reason is found in *The Bondage of the Will* [1525]. He condemned Erasmus in no uncertain terms for relying on natural reason in his insistence that humans have free will. And while Luther demanded that we accept the Word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture, rather than trust our own intellect and philosophy, he was not simply covering his ears and quoting the Bible. Luther responded to his opponent’s arguments with both scripture *and* logic. Erasmus had insisted that a moral command, which teaches that one *ought* to do something, implies that one *can* do what is commanded. Luther responded with counter-factuals. “How often do parents have a game with their children by telling them to come to them, or to do this or that, simply for the

sake of showing them how unable they are, and compelling them to call for the help of the parents' hand!"<sup>11</sup> Luther did not simply flee to biblicism, but used logic to show Madam Reason how foolish she really is. Reason, who frequently "jumps to conclusions" and makes "a universal out of a particular,"<sup>12</sup> is in violation of her own precepts, not just the teachings of scripture. Besides, "If anything is really contrary to reason, it is certainly very much more against God also. For how can anything not be in conflict with heavenly truth when it is in conflict with earthly truth?"<sup>13</sup>

We should be clear, however, that reason did not stand next to scripture with equal authority for Luther. During his famous declaration at Worms, he proclaimed that he would not recant unless "convinced by the testimony of scripture or clear reason."<sup>14</sup> This should not be understood as reason being coequal to scripture on matters of doctrine. In *Grace and Reason*, B.A. Gerrish explains, "[H]e certainly did not mean to set up an independent authority by the side of the Scripture. He meant: 'unless convinced either by direct citations of Scripture or by reasonable inference from such citations.'"<sup>15</sup>

Luther himself was extremely gifted with a tremendous intellect and capacity for reason. Gerrish reminds us, "If 'reason' be taken to include, as surely it must, the skills of the scholar no less than the speculations of the philosopher, then Luther was pre-eminently a 'reasonable' man."<sup>16</sup> Thus, Luther's critiques of reason were a product of his own rationality; a highly critical mind is most able to perceive its own limitations. Luther was as wary and suspicious of his own reason as that of others. His warnings about reason were not a critique of Aristotelians, Scholastics, or puffed-up sophists, but for all humanity.

### ... *The Bad*

Luther's denigrations of reason are well known, but too often misunderstood. His rhetoric lends itself to the misperception that he was anti-intellectual and an uncritical literalist when it comes to scripture. Richard Dawkins fell victim to this in *The God Delusion*,<sup>17</sup> as did German philosopher Kurt Wuchterl, who wrote, "[For] Luther, logic was a work of the devil. We are called to pray and worship, not to argue or think logically."<sup>18</sup> Of course, anyone who does more than read snippets of Luther will understand the absurdity of such a claim.

While Luther insisted that we favor the literal reading of the scriptures, unless doing so is clearly absurd,<sup>19</sup> his exegesis and theology display significant philosophical erudition. While dealing with divine paradoxes like the Trinity, incarnation, bound human will, or the Eucharist, he did so as

one firmly grounded in the philosophical school of nominalism.<sup>20</sup> Even his famous (mis)conduct at Marburg, insisting on the literal understanding of Christ's words, "This is my body," was grounded in a systematic Christology of great consistency and sophistication. (It is unfortunate that so many Lutherans fail to appreciate his sacramentology, thinking him a slave to literalism.)

The problem is not that reason is unreliable, but that it has serious flaws and limitations that we must appreciate. Difficulties arise when our reason is permitted to take on a life of its own and become the ultimate arbiter of truth. Paul Hinlicky clarifies, "Luther's warnings against (speculative) reason in theology are fundamentally misunderstood, however, when we take 'reason' to mean logic, rather than the metaphysical tradition of natural theology which he knows in classical form from Aristotle and Cicero."<sup>21</sup> Rationality and logic are unquestionably good; it is our use of them, and our philosophical traditions, that are flawed. We should not think, however, that Luther's problem with reason was the worldview of one particular philosopher, that "rascally heathen" Aristotle.<sup>22</sup> In his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* [1517], for example, his primary target was Gabriel Biel, who shared Luther's philosophical orientation in Nominalism and the *via moderna*.<sup>23</sup> The problem is human beings attempting to offer a worldview without acknowledging the inadequacy, pride, and duplicitous nature of reason.

First, Luther demanded that human reason know its limits – it is simply *inadequate* with regard to the spiritual realm. The human mind cannot know the ways of God on its own. Natural reason can never conceive of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, or sacrificial atonement for the sins of humanity on its own. Rather, we are by nature theologians of glory, looking for God in majesty and splendor; we seek to approach God through our own virtues and merit. Instead, Luther taught, God comes to us in weakness, suffering, and death and proclaims that we must become sinners in order to be reconciled with God. The righteous are barred and the reprobate welcomed.

The righteousness of God is not what we expect. "This is a righteousness hidden in a mystery, which the world does not understand. In fact, Christians themselves do not adequately understand it or grasp it in the midst of their temptations. Therefore it must always be taught and continually exercised."<sup>24</sup> Human reason, however, cannot countenance this. Althaus explained, "What the word preaches and faith confesses to be reality, reason holds to be unrealistic nonsense. Reason must contradict both the word and the faith which accepts the word. Reason cannot of itself produce faith. Only God can give faith, and that in opposition to reason and nature."<sup>25</sup>

Human reason, on its own, is unable to appreciate its state of depravity, its absolute dependence on God. It maintains a trust in its own abilities. In *The Disputation Concerning Justification* [1536], Luther wrote, “For human nature, corrupt and blinded by the blemish of original sin, is not able to imagine or conceive of any justification above and beyond works.”<sup>26</sup>

It is not that the gospel is irrational or illogical, but that human reason is incapable on its own of recognizing and appreciating God’s claim in the gospel. We are inherently theologians of glory; we do not grasp the theology of the cross on our own. Reason is insufficient for us to experience our sin, which is communicated through the law via the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the gospel makes no sense. Only the ill perceive the value of the physician, and without God granting the experience of sickness unto death, the gospel cannot be properly perceived, understood, and believed.<sup>27</sup>

Natural reason teaches that greater adherence to God’s law creates more righteousness. For Luther, greater moral effort leads to greater sin. This is how the law works; God’s commands are given, not to bring us life, but to kill us. It is for this reason that Luther believed cold hard reason alone, without faith, could not even understand the Holy Scriptures. In a letter to George Spalatin, dated January 18, 1518, he wrote:

To begin with, it is absolutely certain that one cannot enter into the [meaning of] Scripture by study or innate intelligence. Therefore your first task is to begin with prayer. You must ask that the Lord in his great mercy grant you a true understanding of his words, should it please him to accomplish anything through you for his glory and not for your glory or that of any other man.... You must therefore completely despair of your own diligence and intelligence and rely solely on the infusion of the Spirit. Believe me, for I have had experience in this matter.<sup>28</sup>

The inadequacy of reason extends beyond our inability to understand the words of law and gospel; it also fails to perceive that they are true *pro me* (“for me”). It is not sufficient to have cerebral understanding of God’s law. We must make that second movement of subjective appropriation, and this is possible only by the grace of God. After all, “God saves real, not imaginary, sinners, and he teaches us to mortify real rather than imaginary sin.”<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, the gospel is only good news when it exists *for me*. This is something that reason alone cannot grasp. Steven Paulson puts it succinctly, “First, reason knows that God is able to help and that God is essentially kind, but its knowledge lacks the true thing: it knows God’s omnipotence in general, but does not know if God ‘is willing to do this also for us.’ It

cannot apply the pronoun ‘for you’ to itself.”<sup>30</sup> Our reason is insufficient to bring us to the joyous reception of God’s gracious words of forgiveness. “Accordingly, that ‘for me’ or ‘for us,’ if it is believed, creates that true faith and distinguishes it from all other faith, which merely hears the things done.”<sup>31</sup>

The second defect in our reason is its *pride*. Reason is not just insufficient, its fallen nature has placed it in perpetual conflict with the will of God. “For whatever worldly order and reason disclose is very far below divine law. Indeed, Scripture forbids one to follow reason. Deut 12 [:8]: ‘You shall not do what is right in your own eyes.’ Reason always resists God’s laws, according to Gen 6[:5], ‘All of the human heart and mind always desire the greatest evil.’”<sup>32</sup> The hubris of reason begins with its failure to admit its own inadequacy and rises to the level of wanting to take the place of God. We see this manifesting itself in three ways: contradicting scripture, creating new works, and insisting it play a role in its own salvation.

What are Christians to do when the Word of God appears in conflict with human reason? This perennial problem is obviously far more complex than picking one over the other. Luther lived and worked within a theological context that accepted the original writings of the prophets and apostles as inerrant, divinely inspired truth. Holy Scripture trumped philosophy when the two clashed. As a follower of the *via moderna*, this was further enforced; human reason may reign supreme in the “realm of nature,” but theology operates in a different realm, under divinely revealed truth.<sup>33</sup>

Scripture leads us to numerous paradoxes and mysteries: the three-in-one Trinity, the two-natures-one-person Christ, the mystery of Christ present in the sacraments. Other paradoxes, like Luther’s *simul iustus et peccator*, also make no sense from a worldly viewpoint; yet he was confident that they are taught in the Holy Bible. Thus, when the Trinity was denied, the real presence rejected, or Aristotelian virtue ethics smuggled into the church, Luther believed it his responsibility to condemn such worldly intrusions of “reason” into the gospel message.

For Luther, this had happened time and again throughout the history of the church. The papists not only insisted on the “monstrous” idea of transubstantiation in the Eucharist, but also changed the practice of the sacrament itself. They relied on human wisdom to explain a miracle and change Christ’s command, providing bread only to the laity.<sup>34</sup> In discussing transubstantiation, Luther reminded his readers, “[T]he authority of God’s Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it.”<sup>35</sup> Throughout the history of Christendom, there has always been too much compromising behavior from theologians. Luther saw this in that “whore,” the Paris faculty

(after his disputation with Johann Eck) who “has recently been bold enough to open her legs and uncover her nakedness for the whole world.”<sup>36</sup> She proves her whorish nature by substituting human reason for the commands of God. It is the arrogance of our fallen nature that leads us to prefer our own thoughts to divine revelation.

This is also the case when we create new works and insist that others follow our own moral constructs of right and wrong. From fast days to clerical celibacy, the Roman Church had usurped God’s role by demanding adherence to its own ethical principles. “For the papal ass is such a great ass that it cannot and will not distinguish between God’s word and human teaching, but holds them both as the same.”<sup>37</sup> It is through this prideful trust in one’s own ethical reasoning that others’ consciences are weighed down, and human precepts take the place of the commands of God.

Finally, as we saw with the theologians of glory, human reason expresses its pride – indeed its desire to be equal with God – through its efforts to achieve its own righteousness. This, for Luther, was the one great heresy and temptation common to all theologies outside of the true gospel message of Christ. “Thus human reason cannot refrain from looking at active righteousness, that is, its own righteousness; nor can it shift its gaze to passive, that is Christian righteousness, but it simply rests in the active righteousness. So deeply is this evil rooted in us, and so completely have we acquired this unhappy habit!”<sup>38</sup> In Luther’s mind, the Jews, Papists, and Anabaptists all commit the same (semi-) Pelagian error of trusting in their own obedience to God’s law as the way to salvation. They attempt to please and appease God with active righteousness, rather than being passive recipients of God’s all-sufficient grace.

The problem with this is not simply that they are working too hard, or failing to trust completely in the atoning work of Christ. There is herein something far more serious for Luther: they are attempting to usurp God’s role in human salvation, placing themselves on par with God. Christian faith requires the acceptance of God’s word of unconditional forgiveness and adoption as children. Human reason rejects this gospel message and insists on justifying itself, effectively calling God a liar. Moreover, this “taking credit” in part for one’s own salvation is not only presumptuous, it undercuts the life of faith which is expressed in gratitude to God. Althaus did an excellent job of explicating the implications in his chapter “God is God,” writing:

The desire to bring ‘works’ as achievements before God is the equivalent of a lie that dishonors God as the giver and creator.... Such a life would be an attack on God as God.... Bringing achievements before the creator of all gifts and of all powers in this way is an insult to

God. There can be only one thing before God, the giving of thanks, and whatever we bring him can only be understood as an expression of thanks.... If a man, however, tries to bring his own achievements before God the element of thanksgiving is lost.<sup>39</sup>

### ... and the Ugly

This brings us to the third of Luther’s problems with “reason.” Luther did not call reason “*die höchste Hure* [the foremost whore]<sup>40</sup> as a generic insult. His choice of words was specific and intentional, as the word “whore” had a definite meaning for Luther. Luther did not refer to natural reason in this way simply because of its inadequacies or pride. He chose this description because of what the word “whore” implied: faithlessness, disloyalty, duplicity, and a cheating nature.

Throughout the 54 volumes of Luther’s Works in English, Luther used the word “whore” nearly 250 times. More than half of these are literal – referring to women who sold sex, or men who spent time “whoring.” If we consider his use of the word in its metaphorical sense – whether applied to the Hebrew people, Pope Clement VII, the faculty at Paris, the Radical Reformers, Herodias, or “Madam Reason,” there is the common thread that runs throughout: he was castigating their utter lack of loyalty and faithfulness. They had betrayed the ones to whom they had been called to be faithful. This is why he often used the word to describe those committing adultery. For the same reason, in his Table Talk, he could speak of a woman who killed her infant child as a “whore,” as she had betrayed the one to whom she was morally bound to be faithful.<sup>41</sup>

Luther echoed the Old Testament’s condemnation of the people Israel for seeking other gods, comparing them to prostitutes, as they had neglected to be faithful to the one who had delivered them from bondage.<sup>42</sup> The prophet Hosea’s marriage was, of course, a representation of how Yahweh had wed himself to a faithless bride. This particular metaphor was chosen, not because prostitutes are *really bad* people, or receive money for services rendered. Rather, the point of comparison between Hosea’s wife and the people of God was their faithlessness.

Luther picked up this focus of the metaphor and used it throughout his theological career. It is for this reason that he could refer to Delilah<sup>43</sup> and Herodias<sup>44</sup> as “whores,” not because they exchanged sex for money, but because of the betrayal of their husbands.<sup>45</sup>

We find the same use of the metaphor when Luther accused his theological opponents of being “whores” and the like. He made use of Revelation’s image of the “Babylonian whore” to describe the Papists.<sup>46</sup> Indeed,



he believed that St. John had the papacy in mind when he wrote of the “scarlet whore [*dw Rote hur*] of Babylon” (Rev 17:4).<sup>47</sup> Here also the reason for the comparison was the perceived adulterousness of his opponents to Christ, their bridegroom.

Thus Luther did not perceive himself to be introducing any new language through his repeated condemnations of those “whores” who are disloyal to God or their God-given obligations. “Scripture consistently calls idolatry and unbelief adultery and whoring, that is, if the soul clings to the teachings of men and thus surrenders faith and Christ.”<sup>48</sup>

At times, Luther attacked the perfidiousness of his opponents for their lack of faith or moral character, but more often than not it was their use of reason, which Luther anthropomorphized. His opponents preferred their own thoughts to the Word of God, he insisted, and betrayed the latter in favor of “reason,” who is “by nature a harmful whore . . . [who] is so comely and glittering.”<sup>49</sup> This was true of Rome as well as the Anabaptists. With regard to the latter, he wrote, “Go, trot to the privy with your conceit, your reason! Shut up, you cursed whore, do you think you are master over faith, which declares that the true body and the true blood is in the Lord’s Supper, and that Baptism is not merely water, but the water of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?”<sup>50</sup>

Thus both the individuals who prefer reason to revelation, and reason herself, are spoken of as whores for their lack of faithfulness. The question may arise, however, “To whom is reason being unfaithful?” It is easy to understand how it is whorish to betray one’s spouse in literal fashion for another, to choose Baal over Yahweh, or pick natural reason over the Word of God. How, though, is reason being a “whore?”

As discussed above, the problem is more than reason’s inability to grasp heavenly things or its arrogance. It becomes a whore when it betrays its essential obligation . . . which is to gain knowledge, specifically moral and theological knowledge. Reason’s problem is more than getting too big for its britches; it betrays truth for personal gain. It is here that Luther’s anthropology, with its understanding of fallen humanity, prefigures some of postmodernism’s critique of philosophy, albeit in theological language. Moreover, the working of the human mind is not simply limited by culture, context, power, and language. It is morally corrupted so that it will sell its soul for personal gain. Reason will invariably compromise its integrity, and betray its pursuit of the truth, when doing so brings benefit to the individual. *This* is why Luther speaks of reason as a whore.

When it comes to the scriptures, reason shows the same lack of integrity and trustworthiness, twisting the Word of God to make it say what the

individual desires. In his battle with Erasmus over the question of free will, Luther insisted, “Reason interprets the Scriptures of God by her own inferences and syllogisms, and turns them in any direction she pleases.”<sup>51</sup> While Luther failed to appreciate honest disagreement with regard to the meaning of texts, there is no denying that whorish reason has often done exactly what he describes here. From biblical arguments for American slavery to the theology of the Westboro Baptist Church, human reason has little problem bending and contorting itself, violating its own integrity, in order to reach the end it selfishly desires.

If we consider, then, the issues that spurred Luther to action throughout his career, we see the role that he believed whorish reason to be playing. We may also understand why he believed this to be the work of Satan, hence all the references to “the Devil’s whore.” Reason’s misconduct was about more than its self-serving nature and arrogance. The abuse of God’s word placed salvation at risk. And when carried out by those in authority, Luther was convinced the church itself was becoming a vehicle for damnation.

If we start with the law, humanity has consistently convinced itself of its own virtue, its own ability to achieve an active righteousness. Our reason does not want to face up to our own moral corruption and impotence. It convinces itself of its moral worth and progress, certain that it can fulfill God’s commands. Despite evidence and experience to the contrary, it insists that if God commanded it, we can do it. However, it thereby never makes itself open to God’s offer of unconditional grace. Reason persuades itself of its own virtue, and subsequently turns a deaf ear to the gospel.

When presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ, human reason denies the simple message of forgiveness and freedom. It flatters itself and creates works righteousness, placing itself in the driver’s seat (or at least as the copilot) of its salvation. Just as in the Garden, it ignores the divine warning and promise in favor of wanting to be like God. We want to be the author of our destinies, and so corrupt the gospel until we are the ones who are in control. Reason consistently works itself toward a theology of glory where it stands alongside its Maker in salvation history.

Likewise, natural reason does not content itself with the ethical precepts of scripture, but convinces itself that it is worthy to judge alongside God, determining and handing out moral commands for others to follow. Scripture is incomplete or too vague, and so our reason leads us to believe that we are able to share in the divine work of providing commandments. The ability to control others and insist that the world be structured according to our own designs leads us to claim divine sanction for the rules and regulations that we create.

Lastly, Luther was frustrated with how reason cannot and will not accept its inability to understand the workings of the divine. The teachings of the church must make logical sense to the individual if they are to be accepted. If Christ's real presence in the Eucharist seems beyond comprehension, reason must provide the explanation, as in transubstantiation, or explain it away *à la* Ulrich Zwingli. If the revealed will of God with regard to the election of the saints does not make sense to us, we will restructure the theology of the Church until it does. Reason will tie itself in knots rather than accept a word from God that is beyond its ken. And in its hubris, it will abandon the proclamation of truth in favor of elevating itself to divine status.

### *Contemporary Relevance*

Clarification of Luther's view of natural reason has more to offer than historic trivia. It offers a profound corrective to the arrogance and divisiveness which too often typify Christian work and relationships. His castigation of natural reason falls under the category of law; it points to our fallen condition and need for God's grace. Moreover, the recognition of the duplicitous nature of Madam Reason should allow us to recognize our *own* shortcomings, not just those of others. The mirror of the law is to be faced directly, not angled so we can spend our time observing others' faults. Karl Barth famously wrote, "The crooked man thinks crookedly and speaks crookedly even about his own crookedness."<sup>52</sup> It is easy to look around for that crooked person – and often claim to find him or her. Luther's universal denunciation of whorish reason is most valuable when it points to our own crookedness. After all, it is not just the gospel that exists *pro me*.

The honest recognition of humanity's adulterous nature demands hard work. It requires us to be self-critical, humble, and more charitable to the views of others. It forces us to ask whether our own thoughts, theology, politics, and ethics are as faithful to the will of God as our reason tells us they are. Early in his career, in his commentary on Psalm 119, Luther wrote:

Therefore, wanting to remain always in the course and desire of making progress, this is true humility, which truly says, "My soul has coveted to desire Thy ordinances at all times." The proud and slothful, who seek to be holy or at ease, covet a quick end to work and an arrival at the top.<sup>53</sup>

Luther's hamartiology demands that his theological progeny perpetually regard their logical conclusions with a critical eye, recognizing that reason

often persuades us of what we wanted all along. All of our convictions require a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Today, for better or worse, theology is deeply tied up with politics. It is terribly easy to see whorish reason at work here, and also to fall prey to its charms. One need only turn on cable news to see this playing itself out. Bright, informed, passionate people who genuinely care about others look at the same facts and reach vastly different conclusions: We should raise taxes; we should lower taxes. This bill will lower medical costs; this bill will raise medical costs. My candidate is a saint; your candidate is a scoundrel.

Consider the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Bush v. Gore* in 2000. Unlike questions of constitutional law, where different philosophies lead to different judgments, there was nothing "conservative" or "liberal" about the questions before the court. Whether or not to allow alternative methods of vote-counting to be introduced during the review process is not something dictated by political philosophy. And yet we saw a 5-4 vote that reflected perfectly whether the justices had been appointed by Republicans or Democrats. While all nine justices had rational and well-articulated arguments for their decisions, it is difficult to believe that no partisanship was involved, subtly corrupting the objectivity we want to see from the Court.

Upon sharing this observation with a friend and colleague – a very bright, logical, and politically astute individual – he agreed that certain justices had indeed allowed their personal desires to corrupt their natural reason – specifically, those justices who supported the *other* guy. He was certain that his *own* reasoning on the subject, in agreement with the remaining justices, was sound. If we are to "put the best construction on everything," this must be applied to political friend and foe alike – not to the level of naiveté, but with charitable willingness to grant the benefit of the doubt.

Too often, charitable assessments of the motivations of others, along with critical analysis of our own reasoning, are in short supply. It is much easier to be convinced that the "other" is stupid or depraved. As long as I am not wicked or irrational, then my views should be trusted. The problem may be that when we recognize that others' natural reason is untrustworthy, this demands that ours is probably just as bad. We are far more comfortable with a self-image that is good, wise, and true. And yet the constant recognition of our own moral depravity is essential for living the Christian life. In his *Lectures on Romans* [ca 1515], Luther wrote, "The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly."<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned above, Luther did not appropriate this message to his own life very well. While he did struggle with the question, "Am I alone wise?"

for a good part of his life, he was far from charitable with the motives of others who reached conclusions with which he disagreed. In the eleventh and final chapter of Heiko Oberman's *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, this significant shortcoming (matched by too many of his progeny) is discussed. Luther's anthropology should have shielded him from such conceit, "But once he had discovered the Gospel and recognized the targets of the Devil's attacks, Luther became less and less capable of distinguishing between adversaries and people who simply did not agree with him, between diabolical temptations and divergent opinions.... [H]e could no longer distinguish between a man and his opinion, or between error and lie."<sup>55</sup>

While there still remain many Lutheran theologians and clergy who share this uncharitable view of others' theology, there are an increasing number who adopt this conceit with regard to politics. We place a great deal of confidence in our own abilities to reason objectively and fairly on the subjects of fracking, the minimum wage, or immigration, and thereby assume that others' conclusions are grounded in ignorance or wickedness. With this established, our God-pleasing politics can take their rightful place in the pulpit, or be given the imprimatur of being considered "the prophetic voice". Even without the benefit of divinely revealed answers to such complex problems, confidence in our own politics is unwavering. To signal our pious, uncorrupted viewpoints to others, we broadcast our religious credentials or clerical status to all, perhaps believing our callings exempt us from the limited, prideful, and whorish nature of human reason that we all share.

Recognizing human reason as a whore requires humility with regard to our own conclusions, charity toward others', and the repetition of our efforts – critically and penitently – to examine our rational deductions in all things. It is not Christianity alone that teaches, "To admit fault is the beginning of righteousness."<sup>56</sup> But Christians should be sure that this applies in their life, not just their theology.

[E]very righteousness for the present moment is sin with regard to that which must be added in the next moment.... Hence he who in the present moment trusts that he is righteous and stands in that opinion has already lost righteousness, as is clear likewise in motion: That which is the goal in the present moment is the starting point in the next moment. But the starting point is sin, from which we must always be going; and the goal is righteousness, to which we must always be going."<sup>57</sup>

## Notes

- 1 German: *Hur*; Latin: *meretrix*.
- 2 "De servo arbitrio" [1525], in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-) 18:674,13 [Hereafter cited as WA]; *Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther's Works* (American Edition; Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1955-) 33:122 [Hereafter cited as LW]. Also cited in this article are *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden* (6 vols; Weimar: Böhlau, 1912-21) [hereafter cited as WA TR]; and *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930-85) [hereafter cited as WA Br]. Luther's use of "Madam" here did not have the connotation of prostitution, despite his remarks elsewhere. Its reference in this work is to a woman of wealth and sophistication. He was using it ironically, as he also mocked Erasmus's previous work ("De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio" ["On Free Will]) as "Madam Diatribe." Despite its polemic against human reason, *Bondage of the Will* does not include any comparison of "Reason" to a "whore."
- 3 Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth, ed., *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).
- 4 A quick overview of Luther's engagement with philosophy and scholasticism in his formative years can be found in the section "Luther and Scholasticism" in Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 231ff.
- 5 Thesis #24 (WA 39/1:176,14; LW 34:139).
- 6 Thesis #5 (LW 34:137; WA 39/1:175,11ff).
- 7 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 65.
- 8 *Commentary on Psalm 101* [1534] (LW 13:198)
- 9 See Ricardo Rieth, "Luther's Treatment of Economic Life," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (ed. Robert Kolb et al; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 383-396. See also Hans J. Hillerbrand, "'Christ Has Nothing to do with Politics:' Martin Luther and the Societal Order," *Seminary Ridge Review* 13/2 (2011) 9-24.
- 10 See Antti Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology," in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Also, as cited in Raunio: Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, chap 3: "The General and the Proper Knowledge of God."
- 11 WA 18:673,21ff; LW 33:120. This is followed by another, where a doctor orders "a self-confident patient to do or stop doing things that are either impossible or painful to him, so as to bring him through his own experience to an awareness of his illness or weakness, to which he could not lead him by any other means?" (LW 33:121).
- 12 WA 18:673,32ff; LW 33:121.
- 13 *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* [1521] (LW 44:336; WA 8:629,31ff).
- 14 *Luther at the Diet of Worms* [1521] (LW 32:112; WA 7:838,4ff).
- 15 B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 24.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 17 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006) 190.

- 18 As in Oswald Bayer, "Philosophical Modes of Thought of Luther's Theology as an Object of Inquiry," in *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*, 14.
- 19 See Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin – God's Court Jester: Luther in Retrospect* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 104.
- 20 See Theodor Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian: His Positive and Negative Use of Nominalism and Realism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, 31-48.
- 21 Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 117.
- 22 Jaroslav Pelikan observed, "[W]hat Luther most passionately feared was a repetition of the medieval error by which Aristotelian philosophy had been permitted to obscure the Gospel. Since it was Aristotelian philosophy that had done this, it was against Aristotelian philosophy that Luther directed himself. He would surely have done the same against any philosophy that intruded itself upon the Gospel of forgiveness." (*From Luther to Kierkegaard* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950] 11-12).
- 23 Cf. Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian," 35-36.
- 24 *Lectures on Galatians* [1535] (LW 26:5; WA 40/1:41,21-22).
- 25 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 68.
- 26 Thesis #6 (LW 34:151; WA 39/1:82,15ff).
- 27 At the same time, Luther was not building a theology based on experience. Like reason, experience is not a foundation for theology. "[Faith] follows the word through death and life. Experience can go no further than what reason and the mind can grasp, that is, what we hear, see, feel or recognize through the outward sense. For this reason, experience is against faith, faith against experience." (WA 10/1/2:222,22ff; translation mine).
- 28 LW 48:53-54; WA Br 1:133,31ff.
- 29 *Against Latomus* [1521] (LW 32:229; WA 8:107,35ff).
- 30 Steven Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, 193. See also Althaus: "First, although reason knows all this about God, it cannot produce the certainty that God really wants to help *me*. The experiences of life repeatedly speak against this possibility; and since the mere thought of God cannot assert itself against this experience, a man's actual situation is always one of doubt." (Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 16).
- 31 *Theses Concerning Faith and Law*, #24 [1535] (LW 34:111; WA 39/1:46,7ff).
- 32 *On the Papacy in Rome, Against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig* [1520] (LW 39:63; WA 6:291,3ff).
- 33 "While the *via antiqua* insisted on a close connection between the arts faculty and the theological faculty, interpreting Aristotle as consonant with faith, the *via moderna* emphasized the differences between natural insight (Aristotle) and supernatural faith, and pointed to tensions and contradictions between them." (Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian," 32).
- 34 See *Against the Thirty-two Articles of the Louvain Theologians* [1545] (LW 34:345-360; WA 54:447-458).
- 35 *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* [1520] (LW 36:35; WA 6:511,8ff).
- 36 *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* [1521] (LW 44:275; WA 8:592,31ff), in allusion to Ezek 16:25; 23:18.
- 37 *Against Hanswurst* [1541] (LW 41:211; WA 51:508,23ff). Luther did not see this tendency among his Catholic opponents alone, but also among the Anabaptists. See, e.g., his *Sermon for Invocavit Sunday*, 1534, in *Sermons of Martin Luther, the House Postils* (vol. 1; trans. Eugene F.A. Klug; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 317.
- 38 *Lectures on Galatians* [1535] (LW 26:5; WA 40/1:42).
- 39 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 123-124.
- 40 *The Last Sermon in Wittenberg* [1546] (LW 51:374; WA 51:126,32).
- 41 LW 54:395, #5178; WA TR 4:696,5ff.
- 42 As in *On the Jews and Their Lies* [1543] (LW 47:137-306; WA 53:417-552).
- 43 *A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning his Book on the Private Mass* [1534] (LW 38:237; WA 38:272,6).
- 44 *Commentary on the Gospel of John* [1537] (LW 22:127; WA 46:646,32).
- 45 See also his comparison of the *huren kirche des Bapst* with the bride who cheats on her husband in *Against Hanswurst* [1541] (LW 41:208; WA 51:502,18).
- 46 E.g. *Lectures on Genesis* [-1542] (LW 6:240; WA 44:178,27).
- 47 *On the Papacy in Rome* [1520] (LW 39:102; WA 6:322,37).
- 48 *Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter* [-1523] (LW 30: 26; WA 12:281,22).
- 49 *The Last Sermon in Wittenberg* [1546] (LW 51:375-376; WA 51:129,19).
- 50 Ibid. (LW 51:379; WA 51:133,25ff).
- 51 *Bondage of the Will* [1525] (LW 33:120; WA 18:673,8ff).
- 52 As in Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 67.
- 53 *First Lectures on the Psalms* [1515] (LW 11:428; WA 4:315,37ff).
- 54 LW 25:256; WA 56:268.
- 55 Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 300-301.
- 56 A Shinto proverb, as in James H. Wilson, *Love and Live or Kill and Die* (Mustang, OK: Tate, 2009) 54.
- 57 *First Lectures on the Psalms* [1515] (LW 11:496; WA 4:364,14ff).

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## The Significance of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton for Lutherans on the Eve of 2017

*David von Schlichten*

“Elizabeth Ann Seton lived many important lives ...”  
– Maya Angelou<sup>1</sup>

As an ELCA pastor who is an assistant professor of religious studies at Seton Hill University, a Roman Catholic university named after Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, I found it amusing when we elected a new Presiding Bishop named Elizabeth Eaton. Of course, more profoundly, I have been turning over in my mind what the first American-born Roman Catholic saint has to teach us Lutherans in the twenty-first century. In this essay, I will provide an overview of Seton’s life and then consider what she has to teach us Americans in general and us ELCA Lutherans in particular. Given her extraordinary reverence for the eucharist, I will focus on what she wrote about the sacrament and show the implications that her eucharistic theology has for us in the ELCA, especially as we prepare to commemorate with the Roman Catholic Church the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Reformation.

My reasons for focusing on Seton go well beyond the fact that I teach at a university named after her or that I belong to a denomination whose Presiding Bishop has a name similar to hers. Seton is particularly noteworthy in part because she was the first American-born saint and, despite her European influence, had a decidedly American quality to her life and work. In addition, as the foundress of Catholic parochial education in America, she has much in common with other pioneering Lutheran educators, such as Samuel Simon Schmucker. As the foundress of the American Sisters of

Charity, who have worked indefatigably to help the needy and whose work spread well beyond their base in Emmitsburg, Maryland, to other cities, she has some notable similarities with William Passavant. She was also a Protestant, albeit an Episcopalian, for most of her life, not having converted to Roman Catholicism until sixteen years before her death at 46. Finally, her shrine and the former site of her school in Emmitsburg, Maryland, are located only about a dozen miles from Gettysburg Seminary and were constructed a mere sixteen years before Schmucker founded the seminary.

There are also notable similarities between Mother Seton and Pope Francis. Both came from an outsider status, Francis as a Jesuit from South America and Seton as a poverty-stricken widowed mother of five and a Protestant facing harsh criticism for her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Both emphasize reaching to the marginalized and getting their hands dirty helping the poor. Both are disarmingly down-to-earth. Perhaps, then, it is not a coincidence that, just last year, as we were getting to know this pope, a new biography about Seton, the first in decades, was published by Joan Barthel, *American Saint: The Life of Elizabeth Seton*.<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps Seton’s most significant point of contact with us members of the ELCA is one that she has with many twenty-first-century Americans in general: her approachable personality, including her struggles with religion and every day life. Her diary entries and letters reveal that this tiny woman with a capacious mind and vast spirit could likely adapt readily to twenty-first-century America and would quickly have much of value to say about it, both positive and negative. In several ways, she embodies American ideals and struggles. Seton and Eaton could have quite the conversation!

### *Seton Embodying American Ideals*

Seton Hill University’s motto is “Hazard Yet Forward” (which we faculty and staff often quote to each other, especially near the end of the semester). It is derived from the Seton family motto from their twelfth-century coat of arms, “At whatever risk, yet go forward,”<sup>3</sup> and it encapsulates well how Seton lived, which was, in several ways, quintessentially American.

Seton’s early life contained notable hardships but also featured much good fortune. She was born as Elizabeth Ann Bayley on August 28, 1774 in New York City. At that time, Catholic worship was illegal in most of the colonies,<sup>4</sup> but Elizabeth was raised Episcopalian. Her father was Dr. Richard Bayley, a successful physician, and her mother was Catherine Charlton Bayley. Elizabeth was the second of three daughters. On May 8, 1777, Elizabeth’s mother died when she was just shy of turning three. Her father remarried and had six children with Charlotte Amelia Barclay, his

second wife. Those next eight years were sometimes difficult for Elizabeth,<sup>5</sup> in part because she and Charlotte had a chilly relationship, and in part because Elizabeth's father was often away for long periods because of work. Charlotte and Richard had a troubled marriage; in fact, the two eventually separated, at which point Richard forbade Elizabeth from ever seeking reconciliation with her stepmother.<sup>6</sup> While growing up, Elizabeth received typical schooling for a girl that included learning the piano and French, a language in which she became fluent. She would repeatedly turn to music throughout her life.<sup>7</sup>

On January 25, 1794, at the age of nineteen, she married her life-love, a prosperous businessman named William Seton. The two had five children. Those years were happy for the Seton's. They were fashionable members of upper class New York society. Mrs. Seton enjoyed dancing at balls, attending parties, and taking care of her children. Even in those early years, Seton loved attending worship (much more so than her husband, who was not religious) and, on Sacrament Sundays, would rush from church to church to receive the eucharist as much as possible.<sup>8</sup> Her religiosity grew especially under the guidance of a newly arrived Episcopal priest, John Henry Hobart. Later, he would try to talk her out of converting to Roman Catholicism.

In these early years of her adulthood, we see her living the American Dream. She had a husband, children, a house, and plenty of money. She was also a devout Christian in a nation that at least claimed to be Christian.

Those enjoyable years were fleeting, though, for soon William's shipping business started to collapse. She thus deviated from the traditional rags-to-riches American trajectory, moving instead sharply in the opposite direction, thereby epitomizing another American archetype, the stalwart Christian who overcomes the odds to help others. William had great integrity but was not a smart businessman.<sup>9</sup> Although having no business training, Seton would sometimes stay up with her husband until two o'clock in the morning to help him figure out how to salvage the business.<sup>10</sup> By 1800, the Seton's had lost their home, and the family business had to file for bankruptcy.<sup>11</sup>

Then William's health began to deteriorate, thanks to tuberculosis, which would also eventually kill Seton herself. Hopeful that a warmer, milder climate would be salubrious for William, in 1803, Seton, her husband, and their oldest child Anna Maria sailed for Leghorn, Italy. However, since they were coming from New York City, where there had been reports of yellow fever, when they arrived in Italy they were forced to stay in a lazaretto several miles from the city in quarantine for a month. During this time, Seton wrote poignantly about sitting by her husband's bedside while his health deteriorated. When they were finally released,

it was too late. William died on December 27, 1803.<sup>12</sup> At 29, Seton was a poverty-stricken widow and mother of five children at a time when women had second-class status.

In part because of logistics and in part because Anna Maria had caught scarlet fever, Seton and her daughter were forced to remain in Italy another four months, not arriving back in New York until June 4, 1804. During that period, Seton and Anna Maria came under the care of the Filicchi's, who had been amiable business associates of William.<sup>13</sup> The Filicchi's would remain lifelong friends with the Seton's. In fact, as Barthel points out, it is clear from their letters that Antonio Filicchi and Seton had a romantic interest in each other that would never be fully realized due in part to Antonio being married.<sup>14</sup> It is the Filicchi's who introduced Seton to Roman Catholicism. Although wary at first and full of questions – for instance, she questioned the doctrine of the real presence in the eucharist and feared that such an understanding was idolatrous – Seton soon found herself drawn to the denomination.

When she returned to New York, she grappled with the possibility of converting. Father Hobart tried to talk her out of it. Several family members criticized her, thought she had gone crazy, and pulled away from her, although most eventually reconciled with her.<sup>15</sup> In addition, discrimination against Roman Catholics was pervasive in the heavily Protestant United States. Nevertheless, on March 14, 1805, Seton became a Roman Catholic, with Antonio Filicchi in attendance at the ceremony.<sup>16</sup>

Now a widow and mother of five children with little money and the target of religious discrimination, Seton had many challenges before her. Before returning to Italy, Antonio tried to secure financial support for her and her children, but that support failed to materialize. Seton endeavored to secure an income by teaching and taking on boarders, but her Catholicism was often an obstacle; Protestant parents did not want to risk a Roman Catholic teacher corrupting their children.<sup>17</sup> In 1806, William Valentine DuBourg, the president of a Catholic college in Baltimore, suggested that Seton try opening a Catholic school for girls in that city, Maryland being more open to Roman Catholics than New York.

In 1808, then, Seton moved her family to Maryland, where she would spend the rest of her life and where she is buried. Her opening of a Catholic school for girls in Baltimore marked the birth of Catholic parochial education in the United States. On March 25, 1809, she took her vows to become a Sister of Charity. In the summer of 1809, she moved her school and new community of sisters to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where she remained for the rest of her life and where her shrine is located. There, Seton, now called Mother Seton, opened a day school and sent sisters to Philadelphia and New

York to do charitable work.<sup>18</sup> Seton would spend the remainder of her years putting in long days as a teacher, caretaker of the poor, and head mother of the Sisters of Charity, while also negotiating with, and sometimes wrangling with, the male clergy who oversaw her and sometimes posed obstacles to her efforts. She also continued to take care of her children, including struggling to find work for her sons Richard and William and coping with the deaths of her daughters Rebecca and Anna Maria. In addition, Seton struggled with her own health and finally died from tuberculosis on January 4, 1821, when she was 46.<sup>19</sup> On September 14, 1975, she was canonized.

It is in this second half of her life as a struggling widow and mother and then as a Sister striving in poverty to educate girls and care for the needy that Seton embodies the American archetype of the person who overcomes the odds, pulling herself up, with the grace of God, by her bootstraps, to stand up for her beliefs (Roman Catholicism) and make the world a better place by helping the less fortunate. Thus, while she loses the American Dream of having a husband, children, a house, and material comfort, she realizes the American ideal of this tough, faith-guided individual who helps the underdog and shows that there are more important things than material comforts. Seton would spend the rest of her life materially poor but rich in her acts of kindness toward others. She embodies, in a sense, the kind of person many of us Americans think we should be: not concerned about material prosperity, committed to God, helping the less fortunate. However, most of us Americans are more content with the American Dream of a spouse, children, house, and material prosperity. Seton could have striven to regain that material prosperity. There were certainly men who fancied her, such as Samuel Cooper; she could have married one of them and perhaps have regained her life of comfort, but she chose not to. Because she so clearly represents such important American principles, an examination of her life could be especially fruitful in the classroom, congregation, or both.

### *Seton's Devotion to the Eucharist*<sup>20</sup>

When Antonio Filicchi was trying to convert Seton to Roman Catholicism, he gave her books that led her to believe that “the Protestant Episcopal Church was founded only on the principles and passions of Luther, and consequently that it was separated from the Church founded by Our Lord and his Apostles.”<sup>21</sup> Her historical inaccuracy regarding the Reformation in England aside, this statement of Seton’s in 1804 to Bishop John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic bishop of the United States, reveals her wariness of Luther, although, for the most part, she says little about him one way or the other in her writings. Nevertheless, despite her skepticism toward Prot-

estantism once she converted to Roman Catholicism, there is much that she and Luther would agree on regarding the eucharist, as I will show.

Seton’s devotion to the eucharist was evident well before she converted to Roman Catholicism, and not just in her running from church to church on Sacrament Sundays to receive the body and blood as much as possible. In her “Dear Remembrances,” she regrets having to miss a Sacrament Sunday in her preparations for traveling to Leghorn. As an alternative, she drinks on her knees in private “the little cup of wine and tears to represent what I so much desired.”<sup>22</sup> While quarantined in the Italian lazaretto with her dying husband, she again created a substitute for the eucharist, as she indicates to her sister-in-law Rebecca Seton:

Though *communion* with those my *Soul loves* is not within my reach in one sense, in the other what can deprive me of it, “still in spirit we may meet” – at 5 o'clock *here*, it will be 12 *there* – at 5, then in some quiet corner on my Knees I may spend the time they are *at the altar*, and if the “cup of Salvation” cannot be received in the strange land evidently, virtually it may, *with the blessing of Christ* and the “cup of Thanksgiving” supply in a degree, *That*, which if I could obtain would be my strongest desire.<sup>23</sup>

Her longing for the eucharist was so fervent, that she was willing to receive it virtually (since she cannot literally) by kneeling and thinking about the sacrament at the time when she knew loved ones back home were receiving it. On Christmas Day, two days before her husband’s death, she took a small glass of wine and read portions of the Psalms and prayers as an alternative to the eucharist. For Seton, any connection to the eucharist was better than nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Despite this devotion, however, Seton was quite hesitant about accepting the doctrine of real presence. Although Henry VIII, the founder of Seton’s denomination, believed in transubstantiation, the Book of Common Prayer of 1559 indicated a shift to an understanding that the bread and wine were “spiritually taken and received.”<sup>25</sup> This was the theology that Seton had grown up with and had great difficulty replacing with the belief in the real presence. On February 2, 1804, Candlemas, Amabilia Filicchi (Antonio’s wife) took her to mass. Seton writes, “Mrs. F[ilicchi] took me with her to Mass as she calls it, and we say to church – I dont [sic] know how to say the awful effect at being where they told me God was present in the blessed Sacrament.”<sup>26</sup> She goes on to write of a “tall pale meek heavenly looking man,” perhaps the priest, and of how the experience overwhelmed her to the point of her covering her face and crying. She was intrigued by

the mystery and power of the mass, but she was not ready to accept the doctrine of real presence. She later writes of an Englishman saying in her ear during mass, “this is what they call their real *PRESENCE*” and how appalled she was that he would disrupt such a sacred moment by speaking. Then she recalls pondering 1 Cor 11:29-30, in which Paul writes, “They discern not the Lord’s body” and thinking that “they eat and drink for not *discerning* it, if indeed it is not *there* – yet how should it be *there*, and how did he breath my Soul into me, and how and how a hundred other things I know nothing about.”<sup>27</sup> She turned over in her mind the possibility of Christ truly being present in the bread and the wine, fearing that one’s salvation was at stake when it comes to determining the correct understanding of the eucharist.

On February 24, 1804, Seton wrote to Rebecca,

My Sister dear how happy would we be if we believed what these dear Souls believe, that they *possess* God in the Sacrament [the eucharist] and that he remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick, oh my – when they carry the B[lesse]d Sacrament under my Window while I feel the full loneliness and sadness of my case I cannot stop the tears at the thought my God how happy would I be even so far away from all so dear, if I could find you in the church as they do ... how many things I would say to you of the sorrows of my heart and the sins of my life – the other day in a moment of excessive distress I fell on my knees without thinking when the Blessed Sacrament passed by and cried in an agony to God *to bless me* if he was *there*, that my whole Soul desired only him.<sup>28</sup>

Her ache to believe in the real presence borders on heartbreaking, but she was repeatedly wary of the belief. It would be another year before she would convert to Roman Catholicism, and one area where Protestants challenged her was over the nature of the eucharist. Her Episcopalian pastor and mentor Henry Hobart asked her, “How can you believe there are as many gods as there are millions of altars and tens of millions of blessed hosts all over the world?”<sup>29</sup> Much to Father Hobart’s dismay, Seton was indeed eventually able to enjoy “the heavenly consolations attached to the belief of the presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament to be the food of the poor wanderers in the desert of this world as well as the manna that was the support of the Israelites through the wilderness to their Canaan.”<sup>30</sup>

While they would disagree over the particulars of how Christ is present in the eucharist, Luther and Seton would both agree that Christ is truly and bodily present. Luther’s insistence on the real presence is well-documented, as is his lack of concern about how precisely that real presence is achieved.

Luther was no systematic theologian, and neither was Seton. As he states in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* regarding the real presence, expressing his exasperation with philosophical arguments pertaining to transubstantiation: “Even though philosophy cannot grasp this, faith grasps it nonetheless. And the authority of God’s Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, throughout her writings, Seton is little concerned with how Christ manages to be present. She simply trusts that he is there and craves continually to receive the benefits of consuming the body and blood.

The benefits of receiving the eucharist were indeed Seton’s primary concern. “Of all the Sacraments,” she writes, “none other can produce the same effects as the Holy Eucharist... [T]he other Sacraments operate by virtue of an emanation from Jesus Christ, but in the Holy Eucharist we receive Jesus Christ himself.”<sup>32</sup> That intimacy with Christ was of the highest importance to her. She valued having God so close to her, and she valued having God as food and drink. In the journal she kept for her sister-in-law, Cecelia Seton, are some of Seton’s loveliest and most profound reflections on the eucharist. She expresses sadness that so many people fail to understand that Christ is present in the bread and wine. It is obvious to her that

Jesus then is *there* we can go, receive Him, *he is our own* – were we to pause and think of this thro’ Eternity ... that *he is There* (oh heavenly theme!) is as certainly true as that Bread naturally taken removes my hunger – so this Bread of Angels removes my pain, my cares, warms, cheers, sooths, contents and renews my whole being.<sup>33</sup>

She found the presence of God in bread and wine to be such a comfort and so nourishing that she thought “with sorrow and anguish of heart of the naked unsubstantial comfortless worship they partake who know not the treasure of our Faith.”<sup>34</sup> That intimacy of eating and drinking Christ’s body and blood “fills the Soul with a powerful grace, which enables it to triumph over all the perverse inclinations of our nature.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, our sins are forgiven, and, in fact, we become more like Christ through the eucharist. She explains that “other nourishment we make use of, is changed into our substance—but this of the Body our Lord changes us into itself.”<sup>36</sup>

Seton’s understanding of the benefits of the eucharist is squarely in accord with Roman Catholic theology and also resonates well with Luther’s eucharistic theology. In *The Large Catechism*, for instance, Luther calls the eucharist “food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature.”<sup>37</sup> The body and blood are a “treasure and a gift”<sup>38</sup> and a “pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and



body.<sup>39</sup> And, as he declares famously in *The Small Catechism*, the eucharist affords us “forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.”<sup>40</sup> Seton would agree. Of course, there are points of disagreement between Luther and Seton, such as regarding the idea that the eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice that made present Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, a teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that Seton agreed with<sup>41</sup> and Luther disagreed with.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the similarities outweigh the differences.

Perceiving Seton’s passion for the eucharist, Father Matthew O’Brien, a mentor to the newly converted Roman Catholic, recommended that she become associated with the Society of the Holy Sacrament to assist with her spiritual growth.<sup>43</sup> She was now receiving the eucharist every Sunday at a time when such frequent communing was uncommon even for most Catholics, who were only required to receive the sacrament once a year, the so-called “Easter duty.”<sup>44</sup> The following summer and fall she was heartsick over having to live with her sister, who resided too far from a Catholic church for Seton to receive the sacrament weekly.<sup>45</sup> She was ecstatic when she once again lived close enough to a Catholic church that she could receive the eucharist as often as possible, sometimes daily during a time when even men and women religious generally did not receive the sacrament with such frequency. In fact, later, when Seton was Mother Seton, her first Sulpician superior, William DuBourg, actually warned her against receiving the eucharist too frequently. Unconvinced of the danger, Seton attended as frequently as she was allowed, sometimes as often as daily for two weeks.<sup>46</sup>

Her hunger to receive the eucharist as often as possible calls to mind Luther’s exhortation for Christians to receive the body and blood frequently. Indeed, in *The Large Catechism*, he waxes critical of those who are lax about the eucharist. He writes that “Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently. For we see that people are becoming lax and lazy about its observance.”<sup>47</sup> He complains that some people see themselves as such strong Christians that they do not think that they need to receive the eucharist frequently.<sup>48</sup> Others, he contends, stay away unless they feel “a hunger and thirst impelling them to it.”<sup>49</sup> Still others believe that receiving the eucharist is a matter of choice and not a necessity and that believing alone is sufficient (a position all too common in twenty-first-century America regarding the eucharist in particular and attending worship in general). Luther responds to these arguments by insisting that the eucharist is indeed a necessity, going so far as to declare that “such people who abstain and absent themselves from the sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians.”<sup>50</sup> Like Seton, Luther regarded regular reception of the eucharist as essential to the Christian life.

Because the eucharist was so precious, she stressed the sacrament of reconciliation as proper preparation for receiving the real presence. She insisted that the heart ready for the eucharist should be “like a crystal vase filled with the purest and most limpid water” and that “we should not allow the slightest impure atom to make its appearance.”<sup>51</sup> She wrote extensive instructions for those preparing to receive their first eucharist.<sup>52</sup> She urged people not to stay away from the eucharist because they saw themselves as too impure, reminding her readers that “we must remember that Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, that he did not make man for the Sacraments but the Sacraments for the man.”<sup>53</sup> Her words here are reminiscent of Luther’s in *The Large Catechism*: “But suppose you say, ‘What if I feel I am unfit?’ Answer: This is my struggle as well. . . . If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to wait until nothing torments you, you will never go.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, in *The Small Catechism* he teaches that while “[f]asting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline,” the one who really receives the eucharist worthily is the one who has faith in the words “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>55</sup> Luther, of course, still valued confession as preparation for receiving the eucharist, but, in typical Lutheran fashion, he emphasizes it less than the Roman Catholic Seton does. However, both stress the importance of going often to the eucharist and for a person not to stay away simply because he or she is not morally perfect. In fact, Luther goes so far as to say that “[i]f you are burdened and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the sacrament and let yourself be refreshed, comforted, and strengthened,”<sup>56</sup> and Seton avers that “[w]hatever purity of life our lord requires of us . . . as a preparation for receiving the Holy Eucharist, it can never be in itself an excuse for not receiving it frequently.”<sup>57</sup>

However, Seton herself struggled with her sense of unworthiness regarding receiving the eucharist, and that perception of unworthiness increased with age. As she struggled with the tuberculosis that would eventually kill her, insomnia haunted her, and during those sleepless nights she longed for the eucharist on the other side of the partition that separated her room from the chapel.<sup>58</sup> After a difficult night, she writes, “Sunday – Good Shepherd – Watching night and cramp made heavy breast for Communion,”<sup>59</sup> but then she fixates on her unworthiness by writing, “The bread should not be given to a dog, Lord,” meaning herself. But she goes on to recall seeing

[i]mmmediately as the eyes closed, a white, old shepherd dog feeding from the shepherd hand in the midst of the flock, as I have seen in the fields between Pisa and Florence, came before me. . . . Yes, my Saviour, you feed your dog, who at the first sight can hardly be distinguished from the sheep – but the canine qualities you see.<sup>60</sup>

Even though she remains unworthy, Christ remains generous. Such words call to mind Luther's own repeated self-deprecation and reliance on God's grace.

As her health declined, her zeal for the eucharist grew. Her dear friend Father Simon Gabriel Brute Remur describes her intense emotion during one of her communions shortly before her death:

Her joy was so uncommon that when I approached, and as I placed the ciborium upon the little table, she burst into tears and sobbing aloud covered her face with her two hands. I thought first it was some fear of sin, and approaching her, I asked ... "Have you any pain? Do you wish to confess?" "No, only give him to me."<sup>61</sup>

Brute added in a letter to Antonio Filicchi that, in her last days, "Communion was all to her."<sup>62</sup>

The last time Seton received the eucharist was on January 1, 1821, three days before her death. The night before, a Sister watching over her urged her to take medicine to ease her pain, but Seton refused to break her pre-eucharistic fast. She said, "Never mind the drink. One Communion more and then Eternity."<sup>63</sup>

### *Benefit for Lutherans of Reading Seton's Eucharistic Writings*

Through this comparison of Seton's understanding of the eucharist to Luther's, I am not minimizing the differences in eucharistic theology between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. As we approach 2017, it is clear that Lutherans and Roman Catholics still have significant points of difference regarding the eucharist, most notably: the concept of the sacrifice of the mass, the concept of the adoration of the consecrated elements, and issues pertaining to ordained clergy who preside over the eucharist. Of course, some issues that once were divisive, such as transubstantiation and whether to administer both the bread and wine to the laity, no longer are. The day will come when these other issues will be divisive no more, as well.

In the meantime, Seton's writings on the eucharist can be of benefit to us Lutherans in several ways, and it would be especially timely for us to highlight the works of this pioneering Roman Catholic as part of our commemoration of the start of the Reformation in 2017. Two features of Seton's writings are especially noteworthy. One is her extraordinary passion for the eucharist that borders on ecstasy. While Luther writes of great devotion to the body and blood, we do not see this intense emotional zeal that we find

in the writings of Seton. From her running from church to church to receive the body and blood as often as possible, to her weeping over the real presence and her unworthiness, to her sobbing for receiving the eucharist as she nears the end of her life, Seton longs for the sacrament like two lovers for each other. It could be of great value and inspiration for us Lutherans to meditate upon that intense, poetic piety. Such meditation could help parishioners to embrace the eucharist with greater devotion (and maybe then be more inclined to want to attend worship) and could inject sermons with much needed vivid language about the body and blood.

A second notable feature of Seton's writing on the eucharist is its inviting nature. Luther's writings are often accessible and wonderfully rich, but even his best work is full of condemnation of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, much of Luther's writing has a sharp, polemical edge. By contrast, Seton's eucharistic writings are not polemical. They are not about the condemnation of theological opponents but chiefly about adoration for the eucharist. Moreover, Seton was not the scholar Luther was. She was not a professor with a doctorate, and she did not live in the heavily divisive, tumultuous sixteenth century. She was an "ordinary" woman of the nineteenth century. She did not possess exceptional formal education, and her writings read that way. She reads like what she was foremost and first of all, a woman who loved God and loved the Church and loved the eucharist. Granted, she is not without her flaws, such as her sometimes bewildering punctuation and phrasing. But her writings on the eucharist can inspire many in the pew and pulpit to think about and speak about the body and blood with renewed enthusiasm as well as renewed appreciation for Roman Catholic eucharistic theology, at least as Seton articulates it.

At Gettysburg Seminary, this celebration of Seton would be especially germane given Gettysburg's close proximity to Emmitsburg, Maryland, and to Seton Hill University. Perhaps a joint service between Lutherans and Setonians or a joint publication or colloquy that celebrates both Luther and Seton would be mutually edifying and convivial.

### *Seton and the Five Ecumenical Imperatives for 2017*

As preparation for the commemoration in 2017 of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Reformation, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published in 2013, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, in which the two churches articulate the points of commonality and difference between the two, emphasizing the dramatically

improved relations between them and looking ahead to a mutual, joyful observance of this momentous anniversary. The document ends with five ecumenical imperatives that the two churches agreed on:

The first imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.

The second imperative: Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.

The third imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.

The fourth imperative: Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.

The fifth imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.<sup>64</sup>

Studying the works of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, especially her life as well as her writings on the eucharist, are certainly not the only way to be faithful to these imperatives, but her life and work are particularly relevant and valuable. The similarities between her eucharistic writings and those of Luther, as well as the similarities between her life and those of pioneering Lutherans such as Schmucker and Passavant, can help Lutherans and Catholics live out the first, second, and third imperatives. Regarding the second imperative further, we Lutherans can find particularly illuminating her passionate and poetic yet down-to-earth writings on the eucharist as we continue to strive to guide one another toward a greater appreciation of the sacrament. Seton's intense piety regarding the eucharist can also facilitate following the fourth imperative by underscoring the power of the body and blood for twenty-first-century Americans, who are clearly searching for greater union with the divine through meaningful, personal experiences. Moreover, the quintessentially American nature of Seton's life will resonate readily with many Americans, be they Lutheran, Catholic, or otherwise. Finally, with her dedication to educating girls and caring for the poor, Seton exemplifies living out the fifth imperative's call to service to the world.

On the other hand, Luther has much to say to Seton. In his eucharistic writings, Luther emphasizes the importance of the faith of the individual for receiving the eucharist, "the *faith* on which everything depends."<sup>65</sup> That is, it is not enough that the eucharist be completed but that it be used in faith, a point that Seton does not highlight. Luther also stresses that the eucharist arises from and reinforces fellowship between Christ and the church as well as among fellow Christians. This focus on the fellowship among Christians that the eucharist fortifies, which Luther addresses extensively in *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*, is not as prevalent in Seton's writings on the sacrament.

As 2017 approaches, Eaton and Seton have much to talk about. Indeed, Lutherans and Catholics can learn great wisdom together from the interaction between Luther and Seton.

### Notes

- 1 Maya Angelou, "Foreword," in Joan Barthel, *American Saint: The Life of Elizabeth Ann Seton* (New York: St. Martin's, 2014) ix.
- 2 Much of my biographical information on Seton comes from Barthel's book. I have also drawn from Annabelle Melville's biographical sketch of Seton in her introduction to *Elizabeth Seton: Selected Writings* (ed. Ellin Kelly and Annabelle Melville; New York, Paulist Press, 1987). I have made use of Melville's biographical sketch because it is more concise, but I have verified its accuracy by referencing Barthel's more recent and more extensive treatment of Seton's life.
- 3 Ibid., x.
- 4 Ibid., 17.
- 5 Ibid., 21.
- 6 Ibid., 37.
- 7 Ibid., 22.
- 8 Ibid., 68.
- 9 Ibid., 71.
- 10 Ibid., 72.
- 11 Annabelle Melville, "Introduction," in *Elizabeth Seton: Selected Writings*, 17.
- 12 Barthel, *American Saint*, 86.
- 13 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 17.
- 14 Barthel, *American Saint*, 95. Later, Seton became romantically interested in Samuel Cooper, who was single (although preparing to enter seminary), which Barthel writes about on p. 124. However, Seton rejected romantic relationships with men to answer a calling as a Sister.
- 15 Ibid., 95-115.
- 16 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 18.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., 19-20.
- 19 Barthel, *American Saint*, 191-206.

- 20 I am again indebted to Annabelle Melville's introduction to *Selected Writings*, in which she provides a helpful overview of Seton's views on the eucharist on pp. 67-72. Melville's work provided the starting point for my writing here on Seton's eucharistic theology.
- 21 "To Bishop John Carroll," in *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C., and Judith Metz, S.C.; Hyde Park: New City Press, 2000) 315. Throughout this essay, any capitalizations, italics, and other nonstandard features in quotations are original to the quotation and not my addition.
- 22 Quoted in Melville, "Introduction," *Selected Writings* (ed. Kelly and Melville), 67.
- 23 Ibid., 68.
- 24 Seton, "Journal to Rebecca Seton," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 273.
- 25 Quoted in Barthel, *American Saint*, 91.
- 26 Seton, "To Rebecca Seton" (28 January 1804), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 289-90.
- 27 Ibid., 291.
- 28 Seton, "To Rebecca Seton" (Leghorn 5<sup>th</sup> March 1804), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 293.
- 29 Quoted in Barthel, *American Saint*, 97.
- 30 Quoted in Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 69.
- 31 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (ed. Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 291.
- 32 Seton, "Pyamingo Reflections," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 185.
- 33 Quoted in Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 70.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Seton, "Pyamingo Reflections," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 185.
- 36 Ibid., 186.
- 37 Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000) 469.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid., 474.
- 40 Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 362.
- 41 See *Collected Writings*, Vol. 3b, 45.
- 42 See *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.
- 43 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 69.
- 44 Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 18.
- 45 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 69.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Luther, *The Large Catechism*, 471.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 71.
- 52 See *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 264-329.
- 53 Seton, "Pyamingo Reflections," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 184.
- 54 Luther, *The Large Catechism*, 472-473.
- 55 Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 363.
- 56 Luther, *The Large Catechism*, 474.
- 57 Seton, "Pyamingo Reflections," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 183.
- 58 Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 71.
- 59 Quoted in Melville, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings*, 71.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid., 72.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013) 87-88. Accessed online Aug. 1, 2015. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion%20EN.pdf>
- 65 Luther, *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 253.

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## Hospice Chaplains: Presence and Listening at the End of Life

*Charles J. Lopez, Jr.*

Hospice chaplains see their share of death and dying. Even though the culture still seems to deny death, many dying individuals and their families request the presence of a chaplain at the end of life.<sup>1</sup> Martha Jacobs agrees that Ernest Becker thought “that one of the most basic functions of culture is to help us avoid awareness of our mortality.”<sup>2</sup>

We will all die ... some day. It therefore comes as no surprise that dying individuals and their families have either connected with God or they seem to be searching for the “right moment” to be in God’s presence. Hospice chaplains are aware that an individual’s spiritual formation and development has many forms and shapes.<sup>3</sup> Hospice chaplains serve individuals from a variety of religious and faith traditions, as well as atheists and agnostics, and therefore need to begin where the individual is. In their interactions with individuals and families, Hospice chaplains strive to meet the challenge posed by Edwin DuBose in his end of life study: “meet me where I am.”<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning of life to the end of life, “the Spirit blows where it wills” (see Acts 2). The emphasis on spiritual care at the end of life may generate significant interest in going deeper into one’s relationship with God/Holy One.<sup>5</sup> Hospice chaplains are able to be of benefit to the dying individuals and their family members by providing them presence and listening (the necessary foundations for all hospice chaplains).

### *Hospice Background*

The necessary foundations for all hospice chaplains are presence and listening. In order to practice presence and listening for the hospice chaplain, it is important to underscore some basics for hospice. What is hospice? The

Latin word *hospes* meaning host and guest, forms the root for the words hospitality, hostess, hospital, hotel, and hospice.<sup>6</sup> They all include the ideas of kindness and generosity to strangers, or caring for our fellow human beings and offering them nourishment and refreshment. Hospice first applied to the care of dying patients by Jeanne Garnier who founded the Dames de Calaire in Lyon, France in 1842. The modern usage of the word began in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century when “Sister Mary Aikenhead founded the Irish Sisters of Charity in Dublin in 1815 which ultimately led to the establishment of Our Lady’s Hospice in Dublin in 1879 and St. Joseph’s Hospice in Hackney, London in 1905.”<sup>7</sup>

Florence Wald, the “mother of the American hospice,” organized an interdisciplinary team of Yale University doctors, clergy, and nurses to study the needs of dying patients, which led to the first United States hospice in 1974.<sup>8</sup> Connecticut Hospice, as it was called, initially provided only in-home care. In 1980, an inpatient facility opened. By 2008, there were 4,700 hospices in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Connecticut Hospice was part of a demonstration project supported by the National Cancer Institute.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Connecticut Hospice served as a springboard for the formation of a National Hospice Organization (NHO) founded in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Another important hospice organization is the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).<sup>12</sup> Both NHO/NHPCO are non-profit and incorporated with headquarters near Washington, DC.<sup>13</sup>

Originally, a hospice was a stopping place for weary travelers. During the Crusades, hospices were like Holiday Inns for devout and dedicated, but tired pilgrims. Hospice today is a way of caring for the terminally ill, those weary travelers who are nearing the end of their earthly pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup> Coincidentally, Callanan and Kelley (1992) write that “the dying often use the metaphor of travel to alert those around them that it is time for them to die.”<sup>15</sup> For example, by looking for his passport and papers, George is revealing that he is dying and is beginning his final journey.<sup>16</sup>

The pioneer institution in the care of the terminally ill is appropriately named for St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers. On April 10, 1967, St. Christopher’s Hospice, located in the Sydenham section of London, opened its doors. The medical director was Dr. Cicely Saunders, who served St. Christopher’s until her death in July 2005.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Saunders introduced the idea of pain relief on demand and used the phrase, “to live until you die.”

Hospice care is for comfort, including pain and symptom management.<sup>18</sup> The usual place for hospice is in an individual’s own home, although hospice care does have connections and contracts with skilled nursing facilities, hospital transitional and palliative care units, as well as

board and care group homes.<sup>19</sup> Hospice is interdisciplinary. The hospice team consists of physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, volunteers, dietitians, and home health aides, all assigned by a clinical manager, who is usually a registered nurse.<sup>20</sup> There is a written plan (now part of the electronic record of care) of care for each patient, and the hospice team meets weekly to develop, review, maintain, collaborate, and implement the individual's plan of care.<sup>21</sup>

As hospice has evolved, it is often spoken of as a program providing palliative and supportive care for terminally ill diagnosed patients and their families. This care takes place either directly or on a consulting basis with the patient's primary physician or community public health or visiting nurse.<sup>22</sup> Palliative care focuses on physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort for the patient when treatments aimed at cure are no longer realistic or appropriate. In practice, however, this distinction between palliative hospice care and curative treatment may not always be clear and easy to define.<sup>23</sup> Palliative hospice care programs have been introduced throughout the country and are on the increase throughout the USA. The goal of palliative care is to help the patient live life to the fullest with quality and dignity. We turn now to presence for the hospice chaplain.

### *Presence*

Presence is ... being with a person. Healthcare professionals are experts at solving problems, identifying goals, measuring outcomes, which ultimately means "fixing it." The heart of spiritual care for the hospice chaplain is presence; some say, empathetic presence, the exact opposite of "fixing it." Empathetic presence helps people feel heard and not alone. When patients and families are experiencing losses, despair, questions about the meaning of suffering, or a sense of abandonment by the divine, more than anything else they need to be heard and know that they are not alone. Hence, it is essential to create an environment in which the person feels free to explore their concerns and openly express their feelings without feeling rejected or judged. The hospice chaplain is trained to be present and listen for clues to engage the individual and family as they face end of life issues.<sup>24</sup>

The clinical training in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) informs hospice chaplains to be present and provide listening to the patients they meet. Another way to say presence is as Jane Brody writes: "Your mere presence lets those who are dying know they are not alone."<sup>25</sup> In addition, Brody says, "people who are dying often face questions about the meaning of life. Your job is not necessarily to provide answers or solutions but to listen, to let them speak freely and openly without advice or contradiction."<sup>26</sup>

The foundation of hospice is interdisciplinary, focusing on the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the individual and their families at the end of life.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that spiritual needs are more global and go beyond particular religious beliefs to the consideration of personal beliefs and meanings. Some patients say they are "more spiritual than religious." As a hospice chaplain, my role is to provide spiritual care with families and individuals as they are dying and to be sensitive to religious and spiritual connections.<sup>28</sup>

According to James Kok, presence is "turning feelings into concrete, observable, practical expressions of love."<sup>29</sup> These may be in the form of prayer, an understanding word, a personal visit, a phone call, or a handwritten card. The hospice chaplain does all of these, but most important for the dying person and their family is the personal visit.

Lani Leary in *No One Has to Die Alone* clearly indicates that "when we are truly present with the personal, spiritual experience of the dying ... the transition from living to dying can become as sacred ... as being born into this world." She also says that "practicing unconditional love is the most important work during our lifetime."<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Dr. Cicely Saunders were instrumental in the development of care for the dying and the early beginnings of hospice care, which included both presence and listening with dying individuals. While at the University of Chicago, Kubler-Ross provided presence and listening to the dying patients she interviewed as she researched and identified the so-called five stages of dying – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Saunders laid the foundation for hospice care at St. Christopher's by practicing her presence and listening skills with the patients she visited.

Henri Nouwen introduced the concept of the "ministry of absence" when in the presence of an individual.<sup>32</sup> Nouwen realized that it is impossible to be with a person every second of the day. Hence, rather than building one's anxiety level, Nouwen allows for one's presence to be felt while absent. Of course, Nouwen was referring to God's presence when the spiritual care provider was absent. God's presence is always there, said Nouwen, it is after all, "God's work and not ours."<sup>33</sup> Nouwen realized that God's Spirit is always there, and so should the hospice chaplain. The person is in the presence of the Spirit. We now turn to the role of listening in hospice chaplaincy.

### *Listening*

As Thomas Hart indicates, "listening is not always easy. It takes time, and the time might be inconvenient besides. It demands really being for

the other during that period, fully present and attentive, one's own needs and concerns set aside" . . . "To listen attentively to another and to go with another in companionship are expressions of love."<sup>34</sup> The hospice chaplain listens for the hopes, joys, despairs, and other spiritual and emotional challenges with the individual and family members who are facing end of life issues.

As the hospice chaplain listens, Ira Byock and Margaret Guenther offer some guidance to hear. Byock writes that the four things that matter most to the dying patient are for the dying patient to say: "please forgive me; I forgive you; thank you; and I love you."<sup>35</sup> Forgiveness, gratitude, and affection form the foundation for Byock's writings.<sup>36</sup>

For the hospice chaplain the skill of listening is demonstrated by two basic foundations: 1] when the patient has demonstrated that they have a relationship with God; 2] when the patient shares a willingness to go deeper and talk about their relationship in the Spirit.<sup>37</sup> When a hospice chaplain listens and hears that a person has a relationship with God and wants to go deeper, then that is the appropriate time to move along with the person to discover more about their spiritual connections.

While exploring my role as hospice chaplain with the dying, Margaret Guenther's observations are both instructive and insightful. She tells the story of the woman at the well (John 4:13-15) where Jesus helps the woman to look deeply into herself to discover her thirst for God. Guenther shares that "in the ministry of spiritual direction, there are no right answers, only clearer visions and ever deeper questions."<sup>38</sup> In addition, Guenther states that providing spiritual care is about "holy listening," waiting, attentiveness, and presence. As a hospice chaplain the skill of listening is essential. As one never knows when the Spirit will break in, listening is vital and foundational for the hospice chaplain. In the second half of life, Guenther encourages chaplains "to sit with patients and listen to their stories . . . for they are rare parchment waiting to be read."<sup>39</sup> The hospice chaplain should get too far ahead of the individual; staying close and listening intently are essential.

"The true director is the Holy Spirit."<sup>40</sup> Guenther reflects the words of Thomas Merton who writes, "spiritual direction is, in reality, nothing more than a way of leading us to see and obey the real director – the Holy Spirit hidden in the depths of our soul."<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, hospice chaplains learn that spiritual growth can be gradual and often hidden at the end of life. Waiting can be burdensome. Guenther uses the image of midwifery as a way to encourage the individual to move ahead by giving birth to something that is new and not yet known.<sup>42</sup> We recognize that even in the birth of the world God brought order out of chaos. As an individual passes from this world to the next, they,

too, are experiencing a new birth. As Paul writes, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17 NRSV). The hospice chaplain provides the patient and their families with presence, listening, patience, a limited time-frame, and a ministry of absence.

### *Argument: Presence and Listening are Important*

Brother Lawrence would agree that presence and listening are important for the hospice chaplain. He states that it is the art of "practicing the presence of God in one single act that does not end." Furthermore, he encourages "everyone to be aware of God's constant presence, if for no other reason than because God's presence is a delight to our souls and spirits."<sup>43</sup>

Nouwen also recognized the importance of the presence of a spiritual care provider when being with the dying.<sup>44</sup> As indicated above, Nouwen realized that a spiritual care provider/chaplain cannot be present with the dying person every minute. That's why "...there is a ministry in which our leaving creates space for God's spirit, and in which, by our absence, God can become present in a new way" . . . "We have to learn to leave so that the Spirit can come."<sup>45</sup> What a concept. The Spirit is present when we are absent! St. Paul said something similar: "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord, so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7-8 NRSV).

Nouwen states that a ministry of absence is important because it underscores who the real director is in spiritual care – the Spirit. In the absence there is a presence. As a hospice chaplain, I am aware of being "the symbolic presence of God" with the dying, but I also realize that God is with the dying whether or not I am present. It is a grace-filled moment. The words of Jesus serve as a reminder: "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. . . . When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:7, 13 NRSV). For Nouwen, the constant interplay between presence and absence is sustaining and allows for an "ever growing intimacy with God in prayer."<sup>46</sup>

Kenneth Doka writes that beyond the medical, social, and psychological needs of dying individuals, there are spiritual needs as well.<sup>47</sup> Humans are aware of their finitude and yet have a sense of transcendence.<sup>48</sup> It has been my experience as a hospice chaplain that both individuals and families know

when a loved one is dying, and yet families sometimes forbid the hospice team from using the dreaded “D” word in front of the dying patient.

No one knows when a person will die.<sup>49</sup> However, there are signs that serve as a trigger to indicate that the end may be near. Callanan and Kelley point to the following signs: “difficulty swallowing ... rattling noise ... breathing patterns may change ... irregular body temperature ... involuntary movements, and communication may be more subtle.”<sup>50</sup> Some of these signs may occur hours, weeks, or months before the person dies. Each person is unique, hence, these signs may not always be present.

Doka indicates that there are three spiritual needs for the dying person: 1] to search for meaning of life; 2] to die appropriately; and 3] to find hope that extends beyond the grave.<sup>51</sup> As a hospice chaplain, I agree with Doka that a chaplain will “provide individuals with opportunities to explore their concerns in a non-threatening and non-judgmental atmosphere; that it is useful to explore faith stories with dying individuals; and that rituals such as confession or communion can provide a visible sign of forgiveness.”<sup>52</sup>

As hospice chaplains we connect with local parishes, synagogues, temples, mosques, and various houses of worship for those individuals and families who request it. Edwin DuBose has pointed to a Gallup survey reinforcing what dying patients seem to want most, “including death at home among close family and friends, recognition of and support for the deeper spiritual and meaning dimensions of dying and death, and assurance that their families will not be overburdened with their care or neglected in their loss.”<sup>53</sup> He also discovered that among the qualities mentioned by patients as important in their spiritual care providers are: genuineness, humor, flexibility, attentiveness, empathy, and a listening presence.<sup>54</sup> Patients rank empathy, warmth, sense of humor, and flexibility as central features of spiritual care.<sup>55</sup>

As one who provides spiritual care at the end of life, I have assisted individuals and their families by reexamining their beliefs, exploring their beliefs about an afterlife, reconciling their life choices, exploring their lifetime contributions, examining their loving relationships, and discovering their personal meaning. Discovering personal meaning is perhaps the most essential and valuable part of our individual humanness.<sup>56</sup> Hospice chaplains are witnesses to these discoveries and experience the virtue of character in dying individuals. The more the hospice chaplain listens the more the individual and family members become open sharing their stories.

As a hospice chaplain, it becomes more apparent that some dying individuals want a deeper spiritual connection with God. Patients have said that God seems closer to them, especially in their prayer lives. They seem to pay closer attention to God.<sup>57</sup> In Ignatian spirituality it is understood that

“God can be found in all things” and especially in prayer.<sup>58</sup> It was Thomas Merton, the contemplative Trappist monk, who defined prayer as “paying attention.”<sup>59</sup> And Martin Marty has stated:

Being a presence does not mean they will never have anything to say. But their narratives and their verbal counsel will more likely come in the context of urgings, as in wisdom attributed to Saint Francis: “Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary.” Being a presence may mean that silence rules. But Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was on to something when he reminded readers that “a presence is never mute.”<sup>60</sup>

The following two cases, Lillie and Aaron (not their real names), will highlight both presence and listening for the hospice chaplain.

### *Lillie*

Lillie is at a Board & Care. Her husband of sixty years died two years ago while they were living in Kansas. Lillie is African-American and in her 90’s. Her niece brought Lillie to Los Angeles to live with her. Lillie’s diagnosis is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) along with some dementia. She uses oxygen to ease her breathing. She is a strong Christian with a Baptist background. Her niece said, “My aunt loves the Lord.”

[P = Patient]

[C = Chaplain]

- P1: My niece said that you would be stopping by today. I am so glad to meet you.
- C1: It’s good to meet you. I see that you are watching TBN (Christian Network).
- P2: Yes, I keep the Lord close to me.
- C2: You have a close connection to the Lord ... this is very special to you?
- P3: Yes, it is. My parents were a strong influence with my faith. My father went to church and so did my mother. We loved the Lord and I even taught Sunday School for many years. Why there’s even a church building with my parents’ name on it in Kansas.
- C3: You have some good roots and a strong Christian foundation.
- P4: Yes, I do ... my husband also loved the Lord and together we would spread the Word to our neighbors.
- C4: Do you still have that connection with Jesus?



- P5: Yes, I do ... I love Jesus and I'm thankful for what he has done in my life. I couldn't make it without Jesus...
- C5: You seem well grounded in your faith journey.
- P6: Yes I am ... I know that I may not have much longer here (tearful) ... but I know where I'm going. There's an old song that I remember. I don't remember the music, but the words are: "when he was on the cross, I was on his mind..."
- C6: Good words, especially since we just celebrated Easter. God is with us right now. Do you feel God's love and presence?
- P7: Yes, I do ... God is here ... always has been, always will be. Yes, I know God is keeping me in mind ... like the words of the song.
- C7: Do you sense God's presence here with us now?
- P8: Yes, I do ... I know I may not have much longer and I want to thank Him for all that He has done for me. I am thankful that you are here to share Jesus with me. I love being with God ... and some day soon ... I'll be there with God.
- C8: Jesus loves you very much. God is with you and will take you home ... to be with him.
- P9: Yes, I know ... I'm going to be with my Savior. Oh how he loves me ... thank you for helping me praise my Savior today.
- C9: I sense God's love is surrounding us right now.
- P10: Yes, indeed, God is here ... loving us ... thank you Jesus ... thank you Jesus ... (tearful)

Lillie is well connected to the Spirit. She sensed the presence of God in her life and during this visit. The hospice chaplain listened and provided openings for her to stay close to her feelings of God's presence. Without Lillie's willingness to want God in her life and to do deeper, this chaplain may not have been helpful. Practicing the skills of presence and listening have allowed her to move forward.

### *Aaron*

Aaron is a retired Los Angeles superior court judge. He and his wife, Carol, have been married for more than fifty years. They are both Jewish and in their 80's. Aaron has been the caregiver for Carol for the past five years. She has been on hospice and in a coma with a feeding tube for the past two years.

[P = Patient]

[C = Chaplain]

- P1: I spoke with the Rabbi the other day ... I'm not sure he was listening.
- C1: What did you hear him say to you?
- P2: Oh, he said something like "you need to slow down ..."
- C2: ... and have you been able to slow down?
- P3: Not really ... I wish he would have said more about what Moses or the prophets have to say about my dilemma. Maybe something more religious ... I mean after all he is a Rabbi.
- C3: Sounds frustrating...
- P4: Sure is ... you know I've been wondering where God has been all these years. Now I've come to realize that God has been here all along.
- C4: Sounds like God is walking with you right now. How has God been with you?
- P5: Yes, God is with me, at least I think so ... it's just been very difficult for me. I sometimes have my doubts as to what I'm doing ... I want to do the right thing for my wife.
- C5: Yes, you are in a difficult spot and you are doing what you need to do. Have you felt God's presence before as you have been caring for your wife?
- P6: Yes, I suppose so ... I know I have asked God for a sign.
- C6: What sort of sign?
- P7: A sign to know that I'm doing the right thing. I know during World War II when I was flying those bombing missions ... the plane we were in got pretty shot up sometimes ... but each time we were able to return to our base. That was a sign for me.
- C7: Perhaps the sign that you are looking for is that you are providing good care for your wife and asking tough questions.
- P8: Maybe so ...
- C8: Are you aware of God's presence right now?
- P9: Yes...
- C9: God is with you in your struggles for understanding and peacefulness.
- P10: Yes ... God gives me what peace I have been feeling recently. Thanks for walking with me today ...

Aaron realized that God was with him from the very beginning. By providing presence and listening, Aaron was able to move forward in his life even as his wife was dying.

Presence and listening are relevant in these two cases by opening each person up to the presence and the listening they already demonstrated. The hospice chaplain provided the space for the person to go deeper into their own soul. As a hospice chaplain, I, too, was able to witness their connec-

tions and affirm their search to go deeper. The Spirit was present in our visits. Both were comfortable and peaceful. They were thankful to be able to search for deeper spiritual connections and meanings in their lives. As a hospice chaplain both presence and listening were provided.

### Conclusion

Dying is a process involving the body, mind, and spirit.<sup>61</sup> The primary distinction for a hospice chaplain with the dying is related to time. Not everyone on hospice wants to meet the chaplain. The luxury of on-going visits are reduced to months, weeks, days – and sometimes only hours. This means that an individual must be a willing participant in exploring their deeper connections with the Holy One.

Hospice chaplains have specific responsibilities like documentation (now done electronically), interdisciplinary collaboration, and the endless hours of driving to and from appointments. As a hospice chaplain with the dying, chaplains must be willing to meet at the patient's place of residence, be it a home, a skilled nursing facility, a hospital room, or even a board and care group home.

The hospice chaplain is “the symbolic presence of God” by providing listening and presence, in addition to building trust in order for patients to share their stories, dreams, and memories. Being a hospice chaplain with the dying is a work in progress. My sense is that a hospice chaplain stands on the banks of a river getting ready to step into the flow of the river. The stories, dreams, and memories of the patients are always flowing. The chaplain must be grounded and open to the work of the Spirit in that individual's life as the stories, dreams, and memories reach the surface. Dame Cicely Saunders was right, “we live until we die.”

The hospice chaplain is in the presence of the Holy as the individual slips from this world to the next. Just as the river continues to flow, so do the spiritual connections with the dying individual. Those connections continue until the last breath. As the dying individual transitions from this world to the next, there are times when one foot remains in this realm and the other foot is in the next realm. It has been my deepest experience to be in the presence of the Holy One and experience the mystery of the Holy as the individual is ushered into the arms of a loving God (1 John 4:7-21 “God is love”).

Even though the framework for a hospice chaplain with the dying may be fuzzy or the water too deep, the clarity comes in what the Spirit gives. The dying individual is validated in their quest for a closer connection with

God. There is an art to providing spiritual care with the dying. The hospice chaplain who provides spiritual care with the dying is seen as the connector, the messenger, the listener, the “presence of God” for the dying individual and for their family.

Finally, Sogyal Rinpoche writes: “Don't try to be too wise; don't always try to search for something profound to say. You don't have to do or say anything to make things better. Just be there as fully as you can.”<sup>62</sup>

### Notes

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- 2 Martha R. Jacobs, *A Clergy Guide to End-of-Life Issues* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2010) 6.
- 3 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995 [1981]); idem, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).
- 4 Edwin R. DuBose, “A Special Report: Spiritual Care at the End of Life,” *Second Opinion* 10 (2002) 66.
- 5 See William A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola, 2001).
- 6 See Marcia Lattanzi-Licht et al, *The Hospice Choice: In Pursuit of a Peaceful Death* (New York: Fireside, 1998) 44; Kenneth P. Cohen, *Hospice Prescription for Terminal Care* (Germantown: Aspen Systems Corporation, 1979) 13ff.
- 7 Jeraldine Kohut and Sylvester Kohut, *Hospice: Caring for the Terminally Ill* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1984) 6. See also Donald S. Blake, *Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858) Servant of the Poor: Founder of the Religious Sisters of Charity* (Dublin: Caritas, 2001).
- 8 See M.J. Friedrich, “Hospice Care in the United States: A Conversation with Florence S. Wald,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 281/18 (1999) 1683-1685; Paul R. Brenner, “Spirituality in Hospice: The Challenge of Success,” *Bulletin* (May/June 2001) 5-6.
- 9 See Connecticut Hospice, Inc, *www.hospice.com*.
- 10 See Kohut and Kohut, *Hospice*, 20; Lattanzi-Licht, *The Hospice Choice*, 47.
- 11 Lattanzi-Licht, *The Hospice Choice*, 270.
- 12 See *www.nhpc.org*; also The Hospice Foundation of America (HFA), *www.hospice-foundation.org*
- 13 Kohut and Kohut, *Hospice*, 20.
- 14 See Merrill Collett, *At Home with Dying: A Zen Hospice Approach* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999) 33-45.
- 15 Magie Callanan and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* (New York: Bantam, 1997) 71.
- 16 Ibid., 75ff.
- 17 See Kenneth B. Wentzel, *To Those Who Need It Most, Hospice Means Hope* (Boston: Charles River, 1981) 1, 15; Kohut and Kohut, *Hospice*, 17ff; Lattanzi-Licht, *The*

- Hospice Choice*, 44ff; Valerie Nelson, "Dame Cicely Saunders, 87; Pioneered Modern System of Hospice Care," *Los Angeles Times*, Saturday, July 16, 2005, B17, Obituaries.
- 18 See Wentzel, *To Those Who Need It Most*, 19ff; Lattanzi-Licht, *The Hospice Choice*, 34ff; Judith Ahronheim and Doron Weber, *Final Passages: Positive Choices for the Dying and their Loved Ones* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) 191ff.
- 19 See Larry Beresford, *The Hospice Handbook: A Complete Guide* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993) 3-25; Lattanzi-Licht, *The Hospice Choice*, 185; Robert W. Buckingham, *The Complete Hospice Guide* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 31ff.
- 20 See Beresford, *Hospice Handbook*, 31-49.
- 21 See Lattanzi-Licht, *The Hospice Choice*, 267.
- 22 See Kohut and Kohut, *Hospice*, 6.
- 23 See DuBose, "A Special Report," 12; Beresford, *Hospice Handbook*, 17.
- 24 See Lani Leary, *No One Has To Die Alone: Preparing for a Meaningful Death* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2012) 13-23.
- 25 Jane Brody, *Jane Brody's Guide to the Great Beyond: A Practical Primer to Help You and Your Loved Ones Prepare Medically, Legally, and Emotionally for the End of Life* (New York: Random House, 2009) 136.
- 26 Ibid., 136.
- 27 See Janice Peterson and Carl Peterson, "End-of-Life Decisions and the Science-Theology Dialogue," *Lutheran Partners* 22/2 (2006).
- 28 See Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) 34-121.
- 29 James R. Kok, *90% of Helping is Just Showing Up* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1996) 7.
- 30 Leary, *No One Has to Die Alone*, 62, 60.
- 31 See Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*.
- 32 Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ* (New York: Seabury, 1977) 39-54.
- 33 Ibid., 51.
- 34 Thomas N. Hart, *The Art of Christian Listening* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) 16-17, 18.
- 35 Ira Byock, *The Four Things That Matter Most: A Book About Living* (New York: Free Press, 2004) 3. See also Byock, *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life* (New York: Riverhead, 1997).
- 36 Byock's most recent book, *The Best Care Possible* (New York: Avery, 2013) is also helpful for chaplains. In addition, see also [www.dyingwell.org](http://www.dyingwell.org)
- 37 See William A. Barry, *Paying Attention to God* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1990) 15ff; idem, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola, 2001) 91ff; William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.; New York: Harper Collins, 1982) 67-83.
- 38 Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1992) 65.
- 39 Ibid., 127.
- 40 Ibid., 1.
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- 42 Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 81ff.
- 43 Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1982) 30.
- 44 Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).
- 45 Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*, 44-45. See also Wil Hernandez, "Henri Nouwen on Presence in Absence," *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 18/3 (2012) 20.
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- 47 Kenneth Doka, ed., *Death and Spirituality* (Amityville: Baywood, 1993).
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- 50 Callanan and Kelley, *Final Gifts*, 34-36.
- 51 Doka, *Death and Spirituality*, 145-146. See also David Kessler, *The Needs of the Dying* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000) 91-109.
- 52 Doka, *Death and Spirituality*, 149.
- 53 DuBose, "A Special Report: Spiritual Care at the End of Life," 12.
- 54 Ibid., 62.
- 55 Ibid., 64. See also Kessler, *The Needs of the Dying*, 91-109.
- 56 Aristotle says that the virtue of thought and character "reach our complete perfection through habit." (*Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* [trans. Terence Irwin; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985] 35).
- 57 See Barry, *Paying Attention to God*, 15ff; idem, *Letting God Come Close*, 91ff.
- 58 Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 92, 136.
- 59 Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1958). See also Lawrence S. Cunningham, ed., *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).
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## Paul R. Hinlicky's Transubstantiation of Christian Doctrine and Glorification of Christian Philosophy

Charles W. Peterson

There is widespread agreement that the Lutheranism in North America and Europe and in particular the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are facing trying times as we strive to proclaim Christ and to live as the Body of Christ in postmodern environments.<sup>1</sup> Some lament the arrival of post-modernity as a real threat to the church's existence. Paul R. Hinlicky on the contrary believes this moment presents the church in Europe and North America with a real opportunity to reclaim its identity.

In the three works to be reviewed here, *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*,<sup>2</sup> *Paths not Taken: Fates of Theology From Luther Through Leibniz*,<sup>3</sup> and *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*<sup>4</sup> Hinlicky presents the waning influence of the church in Europe and North America, "the loss of its public,"<sup>5</sup> as a problem of the church's own making, the result of our failure to keep the faith in an admittedly troubled and difficult historical and cultural situation. Hinlicky is the Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College in Salem Virginia, and is an instructor in the Institute of Lutheran Theology, an unaffiliated institution for training pastors and educators. In his contributions to journals such as *Lutheran Forum* and *Pro Ecclesia*, he has shown himself a brilliant theologian and at times a passionate and harsh critic of the ELCA. In these books Hinlicky offers a diagnosis of this fundamental ill afflicting North American and European Protestantism, in particular "theology in the tradition of Luther,"<sup>6</sup> delves into the causes and manifestations of this disease, proposes a cure, and begins to administer it.

The present essay will examine and critique the diagnosis, etiology, prescription, and administration of the cure Hinlicky offers. In short, I will claim that while Hinlicky has identified a very important problem which poses a real threat to Lutheran theology (and/or what Hinlicky consistently refers to throughout all of these books as "theology in the tradition of Luther"), the solution he offers is not available to Lutherans and his prescription would only bring more harm to the church. Yet in identifying and exploring the problem, Hinlicky has opened the way to see a better solution, the solution which Luther and Melancthon began to pursue.

In these works Hinlicky presents similar or perhaps complimentary diagnoses of an important problem for the churches in North America and Europe, especially those of Lutheran heritage. As he explains in *Substance*, since the nineteenth century Protestant Christianity in Europe and North America has progressively lost its place and voice in society as theology has lost its place within the life of the Protestant churches, and as doctrine has lost its place within Protestant theology. As Reinhard Hütter assessed the situation at the turn of the twenty-first century:

Today ... theology amounts to private opinionating, so called constructive theology, freewheeling metaphysical speculation without the rigor or restraint that would be required in academic philosophy.... Modern Protestantism hitches its wagon to collective nationalisms, or, alternatively, to radical individualisms.... Church and theology become a helping profession in a secularized society.... [W]hat is left of the church disintegrates under these pressures, since it cannot sustain even minimal unity when expressive-individualistic religiosity runs awry or peace and justice goals lead to contradictory strategies.<sup>7</sup>

It is on account of this failure of theology, according to Hinlicky, that we thus have an "exhausted Euro-American Christianity that has lost its way."<sup>8</sup> As he points out, Gerhard Ebeling had already "sketched the sad picture of 'modern Protestantism'" resulting from this failure:

countless splits in all directions, progressive dissolution not only from its unity but also of its dogmatic substance, such infection by modern thought as apparently leads to internal sepsis, and where the attempt is made to defend or revitalize the old, the unseasonable, the distinctive and indispensable, there we find a defensive attitude toward the outside opponent that savors of anxiety, grimness, or despair.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Hinlicky explains that his intention in writing *Paths* is to address “The sad and perplexing fate of Christian theology in contemporary Euro-American culture: Its loss of public and loss of theme.”<sup>10</sup>

The cause of this problem, as Hinlicky writes in *Paths*, is that since the eighteenth century Protestantism has been troubled by the Kantian critiques of speculative reasoning, and has in response since the nineteenth century, in the words of Jeffrey Stout, veered toward “disguised versions of Liberalism,” which strives to found Christian theology upon concepts available to reason alone apart from revelation.<sup>11</sup> Using a term from Luther’s 1540 *Disputation Concerning the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*,<sup>12</sup> Hinlicky claims Protestant theology has thus become progressively weaker under the sway of the “old language” of philosophical theology based in

a master conception of deity as timeless impassibility [which] is independently established (by “philosophy,” by “natural” human “reason”) as an epistemic fundament over against the knowledge of God given by the Father in the gospel procession/missions of the Word and the Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

As modern understandings of the world and of human nature have progressed, theology has found itself faced with the unenviable choice of continually giving more ground to worldviews based in modern science and philosophy, thus “giving the atheist less and less in which to disbelieve” or, rejecting the good as well as the bad of modern thought by issuing “a direct (non-apologetic) appeal to the authority of revelation.”<sup>14</sup> That is, Protestantism has been faced with the choice between theological anti-realism and anti-intellectualism.

### *Hinlicky’s Solution*

The two-fold problem of loss of theme and audience, of loss of identity and relevance, is not a chicken and egg conundrum for Hinlicky. As he sees it, it is the abandonment of our theme, our willingness to let Christian doctrine take a back seat to the “old language” of philosophy, allowing our theology to be limited by the claims of reason alone, which is the root cause of the waning of the church, our “loss of public.” The solution Hinlicky proposes is, straightforwardly enough, a return to “doctrinal theology.” As he explicates his understanding of doctrinal theology in *Beloved*:

By *doctrine* I designate historically those teachings of the Christian faith which the ecumenical church has decided on as essential to its

fidelity to the gospel and which are thus meant to function as *regula fidei*, essentially: the canonical narrative of Old and New Testaments; the Holy Trinity; the Personal Union of divine and human natures in Christ; and the doctrine of grace as salvation from sin and death. By doctrinal *theology*, I mean the contemporary endeavor to understand critically and articulate publicly such doctrinal decisions for the purpose of probing Christian belief today.<sup>15</sup>

It is only through commitment to doctrinal theology, Hinlicky suggests, that the church can reclaim its theme, its identity, and only by reclaiming our identity that we can possibly have something worth listening to.

And as he writes in *Beloved*, this return to doctrinal theology must be engaged in “the hard work of *critical* dogmatics in testing of the church’s practice in light of the aforementioned doctrinal norms freshly grasped and interpreted in every new generation.”<sup>16</sup> That is, doctrinal theology or dogmatics must be occupied with

the act of critically differentiating itself from what is old (i.e., from that which philosophy can provide)... [I]t requires that dogmatics set aside radical dualism of spheres that characterizes Cartesian and Kantian secularity... The task here is the extension of the biblical “world absorbing narrative” (George Lindbeck), the “thick redescription of secular reality (Ronald Thiemann) under the conviction of the “unrestricted epistemic primacy” of the Church’s faith in the “man Jesus, who created the heavens and the earth,” as Luther put it in the 1540 disputation.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, according to Hinlicky, critical dogmatics should attempt to capture the best of human reasoning for Christian theology rather than allowing human reasoning to captivate Christian theology, as in Protestant Liberalism.

In short, one could regard Hinlicky as proposing that critical dogmatics is the life-giving activity of the church in its healthy state and Luther’s New Language of the Spirit as the medicine which can help cure our “exhausted Euro-American Christianity” of the diseases associated with theology based in “old language” of merely human reasoning. To present the conceptions of the New Language and of Critical Dogmatics is Hinlicky’s undertaking in *Substance*. *Paths* can then be seen as an etiological study in which Hinlicky attempts to explain how our expressions of Christianity became so sick, with *Beloved* providing a few examples of how a healthy church might go about its life.

### *Substance of the Faith and Luther's New Language of the Spirit*

In his essay "New Language of the Spirit" in *Substance*, Hinlicky writes that he and his co-authors Mattox and Bielfeldt began to address the contemporary problem of relating theology to philosophy, catholic doctrine to human reasoning, through their common interest in Luther's work. Thus in this book they ask together,

How by the lights of the old Martin Luther can we today understand critically, affirm joyfully, and confirm publicly the substance of the Christian faith – *res scripturae, doctrina evangelii*? Can we do so in tandem with reverence for today's acknowledged plurality of human experience, religious and secular? How do we judge between deviation from the gospel ruinous of the church and destructive of salvation in Christ, on the one side, and the proper diversity that the Creator wills and pronounces very good, on the other?<sup>18</sup>

And as he explains in the introduction to this volume, the co-authors came to be "united in thinking that the late Luther's logically rigorous turn in method to trinitarianism is something significant for the troubled and confused Christianity of today's Euro-American world."<sup>19</sup>

That something significant is the call to reject the notion that the doctrines of the church are themselves merely the product of human ingenuity, simply another species of the "old language" of philosophy. Following Christine Helmer,<sup>20</sup> as well as Robert Jenson,<sup>21</sup> Hinlicky finds Luther calling the church to conceive of Christian theology rather as the New Language of the Holy Spirit. As he explains: "The thesis formulated here is that the later Luther's notion of theology as 'new language' given by the Spirit contributes to the contemporary task both by accounting for the disciplinary autonomy of theology and by specifying broadly its relation to other forms of human reason."<sup>22</sup> Luther's notion of theology as a "new language of the Spirit" would thus begin with and require a radical change of perspective on Christian theology; one might call it, in defiance of Kant, a Copernican revolution in theology.

Hinlicky thus calls for the Christian church to regard its theology, with Luther, as arising causally from the Holy Spirit as it calls forth first-order confessional claims from the scriptures, second order doctrine from first order claims, and theology from doctrine.<sup>23</sup> To do this one must regard Christian theology *ad intra* from the perspective of faith, and if from faith, then *as the very speech of the Holy Spirit*. He explains:

So the new language of theology, I am arguing, is the Spirit's own hearing, confessing, rejoicing in us of the infinite inner-trinitarian love

of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father. In the Spirit, the Son hears the Father: 'You are My beloved.' In the Spirit, the Father hears the Son: 'Your will be done.' In the Spirit, this discourse is heard – in us, by the new state of faith with its new language that speaks after (confession) and thinks after (*nachdenken*). Our personal inclusion in the divine life of these divine persons becomes effective as we entrust ourselves to it – not some wordless emotion – but in the act of faithfully speaking this very language, that is, by the 'authority of instituted liturgy.'<sup>24</sup>

Such a view of theology as the Spirit's own speech would certainly in Luther's setting have constituted a radical departure from medieval Scholasticism's attempts to found theology upon, and to interpret it, by way of philosophy. It could therefore account for Luther's vehement rejection of Scholastic theology. Indeed, according to Hinlicky, "mastery of (the new language) distinguishes believers from nonbelievers, theologians from philosophers."<sup>25</sup> And since the most pressing task for the twenty-first century church is to let theology be theology and not merely philosophy, recapturing this concept of the new language of the Spirit is key to Hinlicky's project here.

### *Paths Not Taken and the Fides et Ratio Question*

It must be stressed however that Hinlicky's conception of Christian theology as the new language of the Spirit by no means entails the rejection of human reasoning in theology. It rather entails re-envisioning and re-establishing the relationship of faith and reason, *fides et ratio*, theology and philosophy. But doing this, Hinlicky believes, requires understanding where Protestant and Lutheran theology historically went gone wrong in its understanding of, regard for, and use of philosophy. Thus, as Hinlicky explains in *Paths*, "telling the tale of the fate of theology in early modernity from Luther's great endeavor on behalf of the autonomy of revealed theology as a discipline through Melanchthon to Leibniz and on to Barth is the task of this book."<sup>26</sup> In short, the tale as Hinlicky tells it goes like this: Martin Luther rejected the attempts of his nominalist predecessors to found theology upon the old language of philosophy, insisting rather that theology is the new language of the Spirit, an autonomous discipline not founded on the revealed Christ rather than on human reason.<sup>27</sup> In the sixteenth century, Melanchthon's furtive and unsuccessful attempts to produce a Christian philosophy upon which a Christian society (i.e., Christendom) could be founded already began to depart subtly from Luther's position.<sup>28</sup>

In the seventeenth century, Leibniz attempted to complete Melancthon's project with his own rationalistic philosophy according to which there is a harmonious coherence of philosophy and theology. Leibniz failed, not because he did not complete Melancthon's project, and not because the project was misbegotten, but because Leibniz did not understand his own achievement. Rather than discovering *through reason alone* a philosophy *consistent* with Christian faith, as Leibniz thought he had done, or at least as he claimed to have done, Leibniz's "Christian philosophy" was actually, though covertly, perhaps unbeknownst even to Leibniz himself, founded upon revelation-based Christian doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

Tragically, Hinlicky reports, Leibniz's failure to reconcile theology and philosophy through the work of reason alone, along with his failure to appreciate the true relationship of faith and philosophy in his own system prepared the way for Kant, in the eighteenth century, to propose a very different philosophical system in which faith must be subject to reason, and in which theology was (returning to the *status quo ante Luther!*) subject to the "old language" of philosophy. From within the Kantian framework, which held sway over academic theology through the nineteenth century until the recent collapse of modernity at the end of the twentieth century, the only possible ways of relating philosophy to theology appeared to be either those of Liberalism or of misological Biblicism.<sup>30</sup>

But now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, postmodernism has been ushered in with the ushering out of Kant's system. Finally, according to Hinlicky, in our post-Kantian era, theology has the opportunity to return to the state of philosophy before the emergence of the critical philosophy. As he writes:

[W]ith our current loss of confidence in Kantian epistemology as a foundational discourse, 'postmodern' thought represents an argumentative return to the *status quo ante*. The issues today are in fact prefigured in the alternatives represented by Hobbes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, whom for ease of understanding we may take roughly as the Epicurean, the Augustinian, and the Stoic, respectively.<sup>31</sup>

That is, as in the seventeenth century, we are faced in the twenty-first century with the fundamental choice between an Epicurean worldview in which all reality consists of atoms colliding in the void and in which there is neither need for nor room for God, an Augustinian worldview which recognizes that some faith is foundational for any claim to knowledge and which finds knowledge and understanding for Christians upon faith in the God revealed in scripture, and a pantheistic view according to which

speaking of God is just a (perhaps oblique) way of speaking of nature and vice versa.

Hinlicky's proposal in *Paths* is that, picking up where Leibniz left off, we start over from an Augustinian point of departure. But he suggests that we should be, to alter an Erasmian turn of phrase, "more Leibnizian than Leibniz himself," walking the path Leibniz had actually prepared but not travelled, rather than the path Leibniz strove to travel, though he had left it unprepared.<sup>32</sup>

### *Critical Dogmatics and Beloved*

*Beloved* is written as an exercise or series of exercises in critical dogmatics.<sup>33</sup> Having explained the need for and the basic contours of theology as the new language of the Spirit in *Substance* and having attempted to show where Lutherans have gone wrong in their approach to philosophy in *Paths*, one of the foundations of *Beloved* is the claims that biblical, historical, and constructive theology have taken correlative wrong turns. Thus, as he writes:

Today biblical scholars routinely dismantle the text's claim as canonical and then proceed as experts to opine on traditional dogmatic questions without method or rigor. Constructive theologians, so-called, build the kinds of metaphysical systems that Kant long ago demolished for philosophers with a conscience – or with great flourish and fanfare deconstruct systems long since fallen from power – in discourses that few outside of their shrinking guilds read or understand. Historical theologians jealously guard the historical particularity of what once was, anointing themselves gatekeepers who effectively block the process of critical appropriation in traditional discourses like doctrinal theology.<sup>34</sup>

Because of this, he explains, the present project cannot proceed "without a certain measure of violence against the past."<sup>35</sup> Or rather, he might better have said, "against the present state of academic theology."

Since Luther is a primary source and dialogue partner throughout the essays in *Beloved*, Hinlicky is especially concerned "to acknowledge at the outset that the Luther who appears in the pages to follow will by 'my' Luther as I appropriate him, for which I, not Luther, am responsible."<sup>36</sup> But this may be because, as Mickey Mattox puts it in the foreword, citing Bernard Lohse, academic historians have insisted that their task is to "find Luther in the sixteenth century and then leave him there."<sup>37</sup> Such historicism is evident in academic biblical studies as well, and these "gatekeepers,"

Hinlicky suggests, generally reflect the “purpose of neutralizing the *prima facie* claim of the text as transmitted by the tradition.”<sup>38</sup>

But since Hinlicky’s purpose is to be in dialogue with Luther so that the church today may find “help moving forward in our pilgrim way,”<sup>39</sup> Hinlicky is not particularly concerned whether his critical-dogmatic appropriation of Luther is found “unfashionable” by academic church historians. “How can Luther be re-appropriated today without needing either to reinforce Protestant-Catholic or Catholic-Protestant schisms or to shore up an ever shrinking cultural heritage?”<sup>40</sup> is then the question from which *Beloved* begins.

Hinlicky organizes *Beloved* in three sections. In Part One he explores issues in “Luther’s Creedal Theology: The problem of faith in the tradition of Luther today, Luther’s Christology, and Trinitarian thought as fundamental to Luther’s theology. In Part Two he considers two anthropological questions: one chapter deals with the relation between the self, the will, and human freedom; another promotes Luther’s biblically-based account of sexuality and marriage for the church today. “Part Three: Some Objections Regarding Justification, the Church, and Political Theology” is something of a mixed bag, including chapters on a Lutheran and Augustinian apprehension of Paul, Luther’s ecclesiology, Luther’s Political Theology, and Luther’s theology of the cross. He concludes with a short treatment of the problem of Luther’s demonization of his theological opponents.

All of the essays in *Beloved* are rooted in Hinlicky’s critical dogmatics, which in turn is founded upon his account of the *fides-ratio* relationship. Because the way he deals with this relationship largely determines everything he does in *Beloved*, I will focus on a critique of the former rather than on the specific claims and conclusions he draws and makes in *Beloved*. To do otherwise would be tantamount to straining gnats and swallowing a camel.

But before critiquing Hinlicky’s overall project as presented in these works, a few laudatory *ad hominem* remarks must be made. First, one cannot read these texts without feeling the author’s deep passion for the church. His desire to make a positive difference in the life of the church is manifest on almost every page. His piety and love for “the beloved community” are palpable to the reader. Nor can one fail to be impressed by Hinlicky’s erudition. It seems impossible to name a Lutheran theologian of more extensive mastery of historical theological sources. In these pages he engages and challenges philosophers and theologians from almost every era of Western thought. In *Substance* these include Christine Helmer and Robert Jenson, George Lindbeck, Heiko Oberman, John Milbank, Brian Gerrish, Oswald Bayer, Reinhard Hütter, and of course his co-authors; in *Paths* he engages with Kant, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Melancthon, and Schleiermacher, with

Barth serving as a travelling companion throughout, and with nods to Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes; in *Beloved* he converses as well with William James and Josiah Royce, Adolf von Harnack, Friedrich Nietzsche, Patristic sources, Anselm, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jacques Derrida, Rene Girard, Huldreich Zwingli, Krister Stendahl, Ernst Käseman, and N.T. Wright. Throughout these books he is in continual conversation with Luther.

Most important of all is Hinlicky’s acuity; it seems that, as Luther said of Erasmus, Hinlicky alone has “seen through to the hinge upon which the whole matter turns.”<sup>41</sup> That is, throughout the works here under review Hinlicky has thematized a crucial issue in the history of Lutheran thought, perhaps the question which will be of the utmost importance as we strive to find our way in a post-Christendom, postmodern environment. That question is of course of the relationship between theology and philosophy, faith and reason.

### *How and Where to Start Over?*

There are, however, real problems with the way Hinlicky deals with the question of the relation of faith and reason and other related issues. It may be best to begin with Hinlicky’s own starting point, or rather the point from which he proposes we begin again. If, as he quite plausibly claims, a characteristic of postmodernism is a rejection of epistemological foundationalism,<sup>42</sup> it seems odd that Hinlicky would call theology in the Lutheran tradition to return only so far as to the *status quo ante Kant*, to Leibniz’s seventeenth-century rationalism as a re-starting point for relating philosophy and theology. For if postmodernity has rejected the Kantian framework within which theological Liberalism operates, surely it also rejects or at least calls into question the rationalist foundationalism of a figure like Leibniz. One wonders why Hinlicky has not taken this moment as an opportunity to return to the *status quo ante Descartes* to the *status quaestionis* of *fides et ratio* in the Reformation.

To be sure, any attempt to recapture the contours of any Reformation understanding of this relationship will be fraught with difficulties. The most straightforward and helpful way of looking into the problem would be, one might suppose, to consider how Philip Melancthon, the first Lutheran philosopher, dealt with it. Unfortunately, as Hinlicky himself and others have pointed out, since the sixteenth century Melancthon has been a protean figure.<sup>43</sup> As Timothy Wengert has written, the *praeceptor Germaniae* has been portrayed variously as a Platonist, an Aristotelian, a nominalist, an adherent of the *via antiqua*, a Ciceronian humanist, an eclectic thinker,



and/or some combination of several of the above.<sup>44</sup> Given the wide range of portrayals of Melanchthon in the secondary literature and given Hinlicky's often exhausting erudition, it is odd to see the latter rely almost exclusively on one specific account of the philosophy of the *praeceptor Germania*, that of Günter Frank.

There can be little doubt that Frank is the world's best known living authority on Melanchthon as a philosopher.<sup>45</sup> But one wonders whether Frank's image of Melanchthon as a Theo-rationalist is itself an anachronistic fiction made in the image of Kantianism or Leibnizian rationalism.<sup>46</sup> In any case, merely having Frank's works at hand does not excuse Hinlicky the task of testing Frank's claims against those of at least a few other scholars as well as against the *praeceptor's* own writings. As things stand in *Paths*, Hinlicky's claim that Melanchthon was the founding father of Leibniz's Theo-rationalism is based on the recognition that the latter was trained in schools that Melanchthon had reformed a century prior ("it is a matter of historical fact that a path exists here," Hinlicky writes),<sup>47</sup> and on an uncritical reliance on the claims of one well known scholar. In effect this amounts to an appeal to authority and a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument.

Alas, the five hundred year desire and need for Lutherans better to understand "The Unknown Melanchthon"<sup>48</sup> continues. Perhaps then still at the beginning of the twenty-first century Melanchthon remains too shadowy a figure upon whom to base an understanding of options available in the Reformation for relating *fides et ratio*. In that case perhaps Hinlicky could have presented an full account of Luther's own understanding of philosophy and its relation to theology, or at least as much of one as is possible. But while he sets out on this task in all three works here considered, Hinlicky's treatment of it seems curiously incomplete or one-sided.

### *Contra Voluntarism*

Hinlicky starts out well on this task in *Substance*, following Helmer and Graham White<sup>49</sup> in recognizing that Luther skillfully and enthusiastically used the tools of logical analysis in his later disputations. But he merely shrugs off without demonstration or discussion White's claim that Luther's commitment to or method of logical analysis indicates a lingering identification with nominalism on the reformer's part.<sup>50</sup>

Hinlicky is especially concerned to reject, and to distance Luther from, the nominalist claim that the will is the fundamental or supreme power in God and in humans, with intellect or reason being secondary and subject to the power of the will. Hinlicky identifies this doctrine, voluntarism, in its theological application with "the prototypical metaphysics of secularism

with its dark vision of deity as *potentia absoluta*: willful, essentially incommunicable omnipotence whose relation to the world is arbitrary, whose potential ordinate in covenants could therefore at any moment be revoked, all earnestly pastoral assurances to the contrary."<sup>51</sup> Of course, according to Hinlicky, such a doctrine about God could only have come about by way of "a process of reasoning based on the light of natural reason,"<sup>52</sup> that is, the "old language" of philosophy.

Hinlicky's rejection of psychological voluntarism is even more clear and vehement in his treatment of the question of the power of the human will in relation to divine determination. As he writes in *Paths*, this issue is central to the larger task at hand: "This difficulty represents an *aporia* at the fonts, which, I believe must be resolved for this tradition (i.e., 'theology in the tradition of Luther') to go forward."<sup>53</sup> Hinlicky's way of dealing with the issue therefore provides a very important window into the fundamentals of his own thought.

But Hinlicky begins here on shaky ground. For in presenting the very concept of the will, he writes, "As long as they live, in order to live, creatures *must* desire what appears good to them and avert the evil; the will spontaneously desires its perceived good."<sup>54</sup> The voluntarist must in response claim that this is a question-begging starting point. The voluntarist would have to claim that Hinlicky has at the outset misstated (or at least has tendentiously stated) the relationship between that which the human desires and the good. Rather than agreeing that the will desires what it recognizes as good, the voluntarist insists, to put it in Hobbesian fashion, that "good" is a word which simply means "that which is desired." That is, things are not desired because the intellect recognizes them as good, according to the voluntarist; they are called "good" because they are desired.

But what, Hinlicky might demand, could be the cause of such a desire or *affectus*, if not that it is recognized as good? What else could explain a choice? The voluntarist would answer that *there can be no explanation* for why a particular free choice is made, because there is no knowable cause for such a desire. The voluntarist conceives of the will as a mysterious, uncaused cause of human action and thinking. As the voluntarist might put it, to demand an explanation for why one desires one thing and not another is to search for a reason for a choice made in freedom, and to identify a reason for a choice requires attributing that choice to a cause. But to attribute a cause to some action or decision is to deny that it is freely made.

Now, the present purpose is not to convince the reader to accept psychological voluntarism as true, but rather to note that an important starting point for Hinlicky is his insistence that voluntarism is false. For him there must be an explanation for all desires as well as for all choices.

Recognizing Hinlicky's starting point, one can see why he has such difficulty with Melancthon's account of the role of human freedom in faith, as when writes:

The model Melancthon erected to protect justification from being based on human renewal is unable finally to account for the initial act of faith – the turning of the terrified conscience to the offered grace – except as a cooperating will, a natural human “cause” alongside God's, which then separates the Christian from the heathen, even though, *solī deo gloria*, the merit of this human movement is ascribed to God's prevenient grace.<sup>55</sup>

Hinlicky recognizes Melancthon's conception of the will as bound to unfaith prior to grace, but, as freed by grace, free to make the choice for or against God as between two “logically noncontradictory alternative goods.”<sup>56</sup> But then Hinlicky demands an explanation for why, on this scheme, “If man cannot make the decision to be a believer unless somehow through the grace of God this happens, why does one man have faith and another not? Where does the nonresistance to offered grace in the Word come from, if not from the Spirit's prevenient grace?”<sup>57</sup>

While for the voluntarist freedom and free choices are anomalous, Hinlicky does not, or perhaps will not, entertain the notion that the will is, with respect to any choices for which it is free, an “uncaused cause.” Rather, in proper Leibnizian fashion, he seems in effect to rely upon a *principle of sufficient reason* to explain all action on the part of the will. And since, with Leibniz, Hinlicky requires explanations for the actions of the will in terms of rational causes, it seems he believes that reason or intellect is superior to will. That is, it seems that Hinlicky is an intellectualist or a rationalist in the medieval sense.<sup>58</sup>

### *Intellectualism?*

Intellectualism, the notion that intellect or reason is superior to will in the human soul or mind, is a respectable philosophical position. Much more problematic, for Lutherans especially, is the claim that God is somehow constrained in God's own choices by antecedently existing reason or goodness; most problematic of all is the proposal that humans have access to knowledge of any such alleged constraints on God's choices apart from what is explicitly revealed in scripture. Hinlicky seems to at least come close to making all three claims, however. For in responding to Robert Jensen's refusal to speculate about divine perfections,<sup>59</sup> he writes:

If [Jensen's] notion of [God as] persistence in anticipation is to be sustained ... it seems that *some* account of divine nature must help us see *what choices* God made in the act of *origin*. That is simply to ask: What were the divine possibilities? ... With Leibniz, then, we who understand ourselves as the created images of this God have the right, the access, and the duty to ask this question about the divine nature, in order that we may know the mind of our God in His original decision and so to cooperate intelligently with His aims for the earth.<sup>60</sup>

Hinlicky admits that the enquirer such as himself who is willing to entertain the question of *why is there something rather than nothing?* “is prejudiced toward an ontology of persistence rather than of anticipation.” “But surely,” he writes, “the theological task here is not to jettison ‘metaphysics’ but to revise.”<sup>61</sup> What does seem sure is that not all striving to do theology in the tradition of Luther would agree with Hinlicky here.

The questions of whether God has reasons for God's choices and if so whether humans can understand them is as old as Plato's *Euthyphro*.<sup>62</sup> The answers Hinlicky offers to these questions have a certain affinity with the theology of Aristotle's metaphysics, the opening line of which is “All by nature want to know”,<sup>63</sup> and which culminates in an image of God as an unmoved mover, thought thinking thought.<sup>64</sup> Hinlicky furthermore seems to reflect Aquinas's notion that since we have a desire to know about God's essence and since “no natural desire is vain,”<sup>65</sup> we should expect to find humans somehow capable of gaining some such knowledge.<sup>66</sup> It is not surprising then that he is enthusiastic to think that in Leibniz we have a “Lutheran Thomist” to provide us with a point from which to restart our postmodern contemplations about freedom and determinism – in God as well as for humans.<sup>67</sup>

But Hinlicky is not a Thomist in any straightforward sense, and if he is an intellectualist, he is an unusual one. He denies Aquinas's claim that philosophy is in principle on its own able to provide truths about God's essence, and the Kantian claim that theology must be founded upon philosophy. He rather claims (and he believes that he is here following Leibniz in a certain way), both philosophy and theology must be founded upon scriptural revelation of God as well as upon doctrines which the Spirit has raised up from the seedbed of scripture.<sup>68</sup>

Still, even Hinlicky's claim that the theologian basing her speculation on revelation has “the right, the access, and the duty”<sup>69</sup> to speculate beyond scripture into God's essence or for the causes of God's choices is, to say the least, problematic from a Lutheran perspective. As Hinlicky acknowledges in his treatment of *Bondage of the Will* in *Beloved*, quoting Luther:

[I]t is question begging to set up another authority (such as self-serving human ideas of justice) over God. “God is he for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as a rule or standard. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator – unless you set another Creator over him.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Luther then, it is wise and good to flee in the opposite direction of such speculation!<sup>71</sup>

### *Another Way Forward?*

Hinlicky brings forth no real evidence that Luther was an intellectualist. But the significance of Hinlicky’s own inclination toward theological intellectualism seems to be that he associates it with theological realism, the claim that “God does not exist on account of our language,”<sup>72</sup> contra what he takes to be the voluntarist and nominalist “prototypical metaphysics of secularism.”<sup>73</sup> Hinlicky seems moreover to regard these two, realism and nominalism, as the only two fundamental philosophical options available – to Luther and to us. But is this the case? And if there is at least one other option, what would the implications for such a view be for theology in post-modern, post-Christendom environments?

Hinlicky is glad to find support for his claim that Luther was *no* nominalist in the now classic work of Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther*.<sup>74</sup> But Hinlicky only provides one side of Gerrish’s account. For in describing Luther’s difference from Ockhamistic nominalism, Gerrish writes:

Occamism manifested two fundamental characteristics: concerning intelligence, it was pessimistic, skeptical, destructive; concerning all that is related to the will, it was optimistic and semi-rationalistic. Very roughly, it was the former characteristic which influenced Luther positively; against the latter he reacted violently, as the theses Against Scholastic Theology (1517) and the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) make particularly obvious.<sup>75</sup>

At least according to Gerrish then, if Luther was pessimistic and skeptical about the power of the will, he was equally skeptical and pessimistic of the power of the intellect; if he was no voluntarist, he was not an intellectualist or realist in the medieval sense, either.

In fact, Gerrish points toward another foundational view of philosophy. This way requires in the first place a rather modest conception, from the

perspective of either of the medieval *viae*, of philosophy’s goals and scope. As Gerrish writes:

[Luther’s] sharp division between the areas of philosophy and theology is clearly stressed in the Postils, wherever occasion presents itself. Philosophy is concerned with the objects of sensory perception, things which can be experienced and conceptualized; whereas a Christian’s concern is with invisible things, ‘things which are not,’ that is, things whose existence men question because they cannot see them.<sup>76</sup>

As Gerrish further notes, “The natural reason which deals with mundane affairs is, as Luther’s language often seems to suggest, a ‘practical reason,’ approaching at times our notion of ‘common sense.’”<sup>77</sup>

Note here that this view of a pragmatic philosophy concerned with sensible objects and conditions would either deny humans the ability fruitfully to engage in metaphysics, and is thus in this regard especially at odds with Platonism or Aristotelian intellectualism. To the question of whether in sensing ordinary objects we have insight into reality as it exists (or whether it exists) beyond our understanding of practical affairs and sensible objects, a philosopher with this conception would neither say ‘yea’ nor ‘nay,’ but merely shrug her shoulders. Gerrish summarizes how Luther related his theology to philosophy so conceived:

If then we are to do justice to the complexity of Luther’s thought, we must carefully distinguish: (1) natural reason, ruling within its proper domain (the Earthly Kingdom); (2) arrogant reason, trespassing upon the domain of faith (the Heavenly Kingdom); (3) regenerate reason, serving humbly in the household of faith, but always subject to the Word of God. Within the first context, reason is an excellent gift of God; within the second, it is Frau Hulda, the Devil’s Whore; within the third, it is the handmaiden of faith.<sup>78</sup>

As noted above, Hinlicky proposed that theology at the outset of the twenty-first century is presented with alternative ways of relating itself to philosophy 1) the way of materialistic, theology-denying Hobbesian epicureanism, or 2) the way of faith-based Augustinianism, or 3) the way of Spinozistic panentheism. But Luther’s conception as Gerrish presents it suggests a fourth alternative: this approach would allow, contra Spinoza, for a real distinction between the subject matters of philosophy and theology. It would insist with Augustine (and Leibniz, as Hinlicky reads him) that theology is based upon scripture and so fundamentally free from the claims

of natural and moral philosophy. But this view would also, here in accord with Epicureanism, insist on that philosophy must focus on the empirically observable and be free of control by theology.

At the same time, the theologian with this view might well invite – indeed, it might actively seek out – dialogue with philosophy. Theology would have the task of interpreting the findings of philosophy: integrating understandings of the world as presented by natural philosophy (or, as we typically call it, ‘natural science’) into Christian theology, teaching the faithful to think of and speak of the world science discovers as the world created by God through the eternal Logos by the working of the Spirit. Christian theology would also desire to work with other religious and secular ethicists to discover forms of society and life together which produce the greatest utility, as understood from a Christian perspective.<sup>79</sup> In providing some knowledge of morals and nature for theology, philosophy would thus provide theology with new knowledge of the law of God, but never of the gospel.<sup>80</sup> To the extent that theologians believed that living out the gospel in the Spirit requires understanding the law of God revealed in nature, they would eagerly seek this dialogue.<sup>81</sup>

The approach Gerrish describes is consistent with the much more practical, humble view of philosophy one actually finds in Melancthon<sup>82</sup> and some other Renaissance humanists.<sup>83</sup> However, there is evidence that for both Luther and Melancthon the relationship between philosophy and theology was rather more intimate than Gerrish described it. Melancthon referred to his own version of the above view of philosophy as the *Causa Romana*, after his – and Luther’s – favorite philosopher: the Roman orator Cicero.<sup>84</sup> According to this *Causa Romana*, rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is the first part of philosophy. Since persuasion often involves giving speeches, and giving persuasive speeches requires understanding persuasive speech, rhetoric is also the art of interpreting texts.<sup>85</sup>

Now, as Luther pointed out, one must know grammar (which, along with dialectics was regarded as one of the two parts of rhetoric) before one can understand the scriptures. The biblical languages were for Luther “the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit is encased.”<sup>86</sup> But then, because Christian theology begins with the interpretation of the biblical texts written in their languages, and rhetoric is the (philosophical!) art of interpretation, there is a sense that for the reformers rhetoric, the first part of philosophy, was a prelude to Christian theology, and that theology depended in an important sense upon this first part of philosophy.

Such a view would call for the recognition that, whatever else it is, biblical interpretation is in an important sense a philosophical activity (as it is for secular biblical scholars). On the other hand, this view need not be

regarded as denying that the scriptures or doctrines of the church are bearers of the Word of God. Surely Luther made no such denial. Nor need this view be regarded as affirming (with Liberalism as Hinlicky describes it) that scripture and theology are *simply* human words.

This approach would, however, seem to entail denial of the unqualified claim that doctrine and scripture are simply and absolutely “the language of the Spirit.” Much more would it deny the unqualified claim that “the dogmatic decisions are the work of the Spirit.”<sup>87</sup> Luther’s view of the relationship of theology with philosophy (especially rhetoric) as portrayed by Gerrish suggests that while the Spirit may speak “in, with, and under” the scriptures, these documents may still be regarded as human in some important sense. While the view of scripture and doctrine presented by Gerrish suggests a “real presence” of the Spirit in them, Hinlicky almost seems to want to effect a transubstantiation of doctrine according to which, as the Spirit’s speech, it is infallible.

### *Theological Pragmatism?*

To be sure, as Hinlicky concedes, “Luther thinks that dogmatic beliefs can be true or false.”<sup>88</sup> But how can Hinlicky consistently hold his very high view of the reliability of doctrine and be faithful to Luther’s critical spirit? Hinlicky believes the answer lies in what he calls “theological pragmatics.”<sup>89</sup>

The central claim of Hinlicky’s theological pragmatics is that theology is not to provide *scientia* about God, as in Aristotelian Thomism, but to bring about “a churchly and pragmatic *credamus ut confiteamur* in spiritual battle with a world that refuses the promise of God’s reign.”<sup>90</sup> Thus Hinlicky writes, “Luther does not think of knowledge of God in theology as ‘theory,’ as intellectual gaze upon a perfect, simply self-identical substance,”<sup>91</sup> but rather as “‘*notitia*,’ based upon direct access of faith to the object of knowledge, which is named but not (ever, in all eternity) comprehended.”<sup>92</sup> Hinlicky claims a real affinity here in Luther’s thought with philosophical pragmatism, which “regards beliefs as rules for action.”<sup>93</sup>

Up to this point Hinlicky is on well-travelled ground. It has long been claimed that for Luther the test of authenticity of a word claiming to be of God is, to use Gerhard Forde’s phrase, whether or not it “does God” to the hearer or reader. “That is,” as Timothy Wengert has more recently put it, such a word must “put the old creature to death and then bring the new to life. Or, to put it another way, God’s Word makes believers in Christ out of us.”<sup>94</sup> Thus Luther’s well-known phrase for judging the apostolicity of scriptural texts, “*Was Christum treibet*,”<sup>95</sup> may be said to be Luther’s theological-utilitarian criterion for the truthfulness of doctrine.

Hinlicky's own pragmatic conception of theological truth adds an important qualifier to Luther's *Was Christum treibet*, however. As Hinlicky writes: "The truth of doctrinal statements resides in their regulative service as attesting this saving person of Christ, the person who unites God and humanity in a new covenant of mercy, against the deceptions of Satan, who would tear asunder this saving unity of God and humanity by attacking Christ's person through deviant teaching."<sup>96</sup> Thus, according to Hinlicky, that which conveys Christ also at the same time must be that which rejects "deviant teaching." And so he claims the criterion for truthfulness is duplex rather than simple: "In the interim, the truthfulness of our beliefs is critically tested by the double criterion of utility in experience and coherence with other beliefs we hold true ... putting us to work on the coherence of these beliefs, both internally in the body of church doctrine and externally with respect to all creation."<sup>97</sup> Luther did not seem to have the sort of theological-truth-criterion of coherence with church dogma that Hinlicky calls for, and the consequences of Hinlicky's amendment are profound.

To be sure, at Worms Luther as much as stated a criterion of coherence with the Word of God when he famously declared: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."<sup>98</sup> But of course correlative to this scriptural criterion was the presumption that much church doctrine, many traditional teachings, and even dogmatic decisions may *not be* the work of the Spirit. They were to be tested against scripture and reason.

Even more striking was Luther's treatment of the apostolicity of scriptural texts. For Luther, *was Christum treibet* was the final word on apostolicity, and he was willing to disregard even books of scripture that did not usefully "do God" to the sinner. As he perhaps infamously claimed: "All the genuine books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate Christ.... Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it."<sup>99</sup> Hinlicky is right to point out that Luther plumbed the depths of the catholic tradition for theological insights which would continue to aid the church in proclaiming Christ, and he is right to call the church today to do the same. But Hinlicky does not highlight Luther's boldness in disregard and disdain for texts or teachings that do not proclaim Christ, and Hinlicky's "theological pragmatics" would seem to prevent the faithful from seeking reform. To be sure, Luther believed that the church must make assertions, but he did not

believe or suggest that the church was infallible in making such assertions. Thus while Luther upbraided Erasmus with "*Spiritus Sanctus non est scepticus*" he was also clear at Worms and elsewhere that neither the voice of the theologian, nor of the magisterium, nor of the council, nor even of John of Patmos is purely and without qualification the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Hinlicky's insertion of the coherence-with-other-doctrines principle thus signals a radical departure from Luther's criterion for doctrine. While for Luther nothing could be considered apostolic if it does not convey Christ, for Hinlicky it seems that nothing can be said to convey Christ if it does not cohere with the whole body of Christian doctrine. While Luther's principle helped him search out where reformation is needed, Hinlicky's principles would prevent it. Hinlicky thus seems to seek not the teaching (or reformation of teaching) most conducive to full human flourishing under Christ, but the most comforting and pastoral way of teaching the traditional Christian doctrines.

One sees this failure of Hinlicky's pragmatics in the way he treats two issues of great concern to him in *Beloved*: Luther's rhetoric of demonization used against those he saw as theological opponents, in particular the Jews,<sup>100</sup> and the question of the church's condemnation of homosexuality.<sup>101</sup> Now, it is clear that Hinlicky is appalled at some of Luther's anti-Semitic invective. He declares it sinful.<sup>102</sup> He asserts the importance for the church to make space to dialogue in charitable disagreement with others.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, Hinlicky notes that Luther was wrong to understand himself as God's apocalyptic prophet,<sup>104</sup> and he asserts that Lutherans have been wrong in not allowing Luther to be wrong. He blames confessionalism for upholding Luther as a hero rather than as a fallible theologian,<sup>105</sup> and Nazism for using this hero of the German people to support its own horrific version of anti-Semitism.<sup>106</sup> But in the end Hinlicky cannot explain why Luther was wrong here theologically.

Most of Hinlicky's treatment of Luther's demonizing rhetoric is dedicated to demonstrating that Christian faith must continue to maintain a teaching about the devil and then to consider how the church can go about "refiguring the Evil One."<sup>107</sup> The devil for him, as stated in his pragmatic criteriology, is the one who purveys false teachings contrary to Christ. But if we are to maintain such a teaching, how, on Hinlicky's criteria, can one avoid identifying traditions which teach non-Christian faith or unfaith as demonic? Again, that Hinlicky wants to reject Luther's invective is clear. How or whether his duplex criterion for theological truthfulness is of any help to him – or the reader! – in doing so is not clear.

Likewise, when Hinlicky turns in *Beloved* to the question of "whether a homosexual orientation is ever God's good creation, or always an evidence

of the 'fall' as a rejection of one's good creation,"<sup>108</sup> his compassion is clear. He promotes same-sex civil unions and he praises pastors for upholding private same-sex unions over many generations. But he will not, he cannot, promote a change in the church's teaching about the matter.

For Hinlicky, that the church has a tradition of interpreting Genesis 1-3 as promoting heterosexual marriage with children as *the* godly expression of human sexual expression seems to settle the issue as soon as it is raised. Other forms of expression and family life must be considered "disordered." "Nor is there any other 'blessing' from the Word of God for the church to pronounce over a (homosexual) marriage."<sup>109</sup> There is and can be nothing else, in Hinlicky's scheme, that can be faithful to the Spirit of Christ. No amount of data, no expression of collective experience can alter the fact that the church has a traditional teaching on the matter, and in this doctrine, according to Hinlicky, the Spirit has spoken, and since the Spirit will not contradict itself, the matter is settled.

The real difficulty with Hinlicky here is not that he has drawn this or that conclusion about homosexuality, but rather in the way Hinlicky uses his criteria for determining how to draw these conclusions. Again, his duplex pragmatic criterion for theological faithfulness considers a) what conduces to the greater utility and b) what conforms to traditional teaching. Luther may well have had similar criteria, but his utilitarian principle, "what conveys Christ", was primary for him, and any criterion of conservation of doctrine was secondary and subject to it. This allowed or rather compelled Luther to seek reforms in teaching when those teachings stood in the way of experiencing God as gracious, and to maintain traditions, rules, and teachings which were found to "do God."

For Hinlicky it seems to be the other way around. For him, the conservation of tradition is primary. It is not that Hinlicky believes one should preserve doctrine even when it does not convey Christ. Rather, the duplex criterion of truthfulness of his theological pragmatics leads him to hold that in principle only that which conforms to standing doctrine can actually convey Christ. Or rather, since the doctrinal decisions of the church are the work of the Spirit, and the Spirit always conveys Christ, the church's doctrinal decisions always must be those which convey Christ. Again, while Luther's approach sought to conserve the most doctrine given the need to proclaim the gospel, Hinlicky's approach seems to seek out the most pastoral way of bringing people in line with doctrine, which, being the Spirit's own speech in principle, is infallible and must not be reformed.

Rather, Hinlicky begins to suggest, it is our natural philosophy that must be reformed to conform to the church's doctrine. Hinlicky calls for 'better science' about homosexuality. "If one maintains theologically that

homophile desire is disordered," he writes, "I do not see how one can avoid difficult explorations into the sexual abuse or emotional neglect of children by parents and other adult figures that positively correlates with adult homosexual identity."<sup>110</sup> And here we see the real danger (to philosophy and to theology) in Hinlicky's proposal to base philosophy (such as natural philosophy, that is, natural science) on faith.

Surely one should be concerned about the effects of sexual abuse on children regardless of one's theology. Surely one's theology should not determine the outcome of scientific research. Surely rather, contra Hinlicky, scientific research can help the church understand human nature. In the case at hand, surely it is a biological question, not a theological one, whether homosexuality is a condition occurring naturally, and it is a sociological question whether legal recognition and protection of homosexual marriage and family life would conduce to better, more stable communities and greater overall flourishing or not. And surely the theologian should base her own consideration of what is 'natural' in part on such data. And surely the church's teaching about marriage and family life should reflect our changing understanding of what is 'natural.'

### *Summary and Conclusion*

Hinlicky is right to point out that the *fides et ratio* problem has always been vexing for Lutherans, and that the need to answer questions posed by our setting is more urgent than ever in a post-Kantian, postmodern, post-Christendom era. Unfortunately, Hinlicky moves toward a divinized theology and a view of philosophy as glorified by its subjection to this theology. Hinlicky's understanding of theology and philosophy would prevent the church from reforming its doctrine in conformity with Christ as it did with Luther, it would prevent the church from putting the best products of natural and moral philosophy to work in the service of doctrine as it did with Melancthon, and it claims that the theologian has the right, the duty, and the ability to delve beyond scripture into the mysteries of God's will, as well as into the very mysteries of human nature, contrary to Luther. It is hard to see how one wishing to remain "in the tradition of Luther" could walk down such a road, or how it could be regarded as anything but a theology of glory.

In the works under review here, Hinlicky falls prey to the very danger he seeks to save "theology in the tradition of Luther" from. To use a term from Richard Rorty, the danger is that of Philosophy overcoming and consuming Christian theology. Rorty distinguished *Philosophy* (with a "P") from *philosophy* (with a "p") by suggesting that whereas the former, Philosophy in the Platonic tradition, claims in effect to have "the right, duty, and access"

to metaphysical truth by way of human faculty capable of attaining it, the latter is merely the pragmatic, fallible pursuit of beliefs about the world and human life in it, which beliefs are justified by their ability to help humans navigate the world in ways conducive to human flourishing, and which are always revisable in the face of evidence that there are better ways available of conceiving of things.<sup>111</sup>

If Gerrish and others are right, the reformers said ‘No!’ to Philosophy, ‘Yes!’ to philosophy, and they did theology in accord with this ‘no’ and ‘yes.’ Hinlicky on the other hand seems to regard Philosophy, with its bedazzling claims to be able to penetrate the mysteries of reality, as a powerful and frightening beast which must be captured and domesticated in service to theology. In Heidelberg, Luther in effect proclaimed that the Scholastics had failed to tame this beast and that instead their theology had been consumed by it. As Hinlicky himself points out throughout *Paths*, Lutherans since the Reformation have suffered the same fate. And yet in *Substance*, *Paths*, and *Beloved* one sees in Hinlicky yet another brilliant theologian on the verge of being consumed in the process of striving to tie a bell around the beast’s neck.

Luther himself appears to have related *fides et ratio* in a different way. The starting point along his road was to acknowledge that like a fire-breathing dragon (big “P”) Philosophy is a scary beast, but also to acknowledge that, like such a dragon, Philosophy is a beast of fiction. But could Luther’s and Melancthon’s rhetorically-based, philosophically skeptical, humanistic, utilitarian small “p” view of philosophy and its relation to theology provide contemporary Christianity – Lutheranism in particular – a way through the wilderness of our post-Christian, postmodern environments? We may have no other choice but to find out. But we cannot say for certain as long as it remains a path not taken.

## Notes

- 1 Eloquenty stated by Cheryl M. Peterson in *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 1-6.
- 2 Dennis Bielfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox, and Paul R. Hinlicky, *The Substance of the Faith: Luther’s Doctrinal Theology for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); henceforth I will refer to this simply as ‘*Substance*.’
- 3 Paul R. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken: Fates of Theology from Luther through Leibniz* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); henceforth I will refer to this simply as ‘*Paths*.’
- 4 Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); henceforth I will refer to this simply as ‘*Beloved*.’
- 5 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 1.

- 6 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 140.
- 7 Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (trans. D. Stott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 22; quoted in Hinlicky, *Substance*, 149.
- 8 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 7.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 1.
- 11 Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 147; quoted in Hinlicky, *Paths*, 1-2.
- 12 WA 39/2:92-121; trans. by Christopher B. Brown for Project Wittenberg, <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-divinity.txt> (accessed on March 10, 2015); Hinlicky, *Substance*, 131-134.
- 13 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 137.
- 14 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 2, quoting Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight From Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, Ind., and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 147.
- 15 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, xvi.
- 16 Ibid., xvii.
- 17 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 146.
- 18 Ibid., 132
- 19 Ibid., 8.
- 20 Ibid., 136; Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study in the Relationship between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther’s Works [1523-1546]* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1999) 69.
- 21 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 140; Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 37.
- 22 Ibid., 132.
- 23 Ibid., 189-190.
- 24 Ibid., 139
- 25 Ibid., 135.
- 26 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 2.
- 27 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 138-144; See also *Paths*, 137-154.
- 28 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 127-222.
- 29 Ibid., 17-42, 223-282.
- 30 Ibid., 1-16.
- 31 Ibid., 3.
- 32 Ibid., 10-12.
- 33 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, xv.
- 34 Ibid., xvii.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid., xviii
- 37 Mickey Mattox in the foreword to *Beloved*, xiii.
- 38 Ibid., xix.
- 39 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, xviii.
- 40 Ibid., xvi.
- 41 Ibid., 149, citing Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston; Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revel, 2000) 31.
- 42 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 10-11.

- 43 Ibid., 155, where Hinlicky quotes Ralph Quere on the history of villianizations of Melanchthon in *Melanchthon's Christum Cognoscere: Christ's Efficacious Presence in the Eucharistic Theology of Melanchthon* (Bibliotheca Humanistica and Reformatorica 22; Niewkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977) 6 n. 9.
- 44 Timothy Wengert, "Beyond Stereotypes: The Real Philip Melanchthon," in *Philip Melanchthon: Then and Now [1497-1560]* (Scott H. Hendrix and Wengert, eds.; Columbia; The Easter Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries, 1999) 9-32.
- 45 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 215.
- 46 Günter Frank, *Die Theologische Philosophie Philipp Melanchthons [1497-1560]* (Erfurter Theologische Studien 67; Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1995) 99, 211. For a critique of Frank's account of Melanchthon's philosophy, see Charles Peterson, *The Humanistic, Fideistic Philosophy of Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University, 2012) 298-316.
- 47 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 10.
- 48 The epithet is still fitting fifty years after the publication of Robert Stuperich's *Der unbekannte Melanchthon* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961).
- 49 Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in Light of Their Medieval Background* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1994); Hinlicky in *Substance*, 134-138.
- 50 Hinlicky writes: "The question of nominalist content and its influence on Luther has been controversial. See White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 27-31. As heavily as I draw on graham White's study of Luther's logical and semantic concerns, I do not agree with him that Luther in any simple sense can be designated a modernist, nominalist, or Ockhamist." (*Substance*, 148, n. 55)
- 51 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 148
- 52 Ibid., 146.
- 53 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 13.
- 54 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 152.
- 55 Ibid., 157.
- 56 Ibid., 150.
- 57 Ibid., 130, citing John Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus and Its Significance for Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953) 169. Hinlicky believes Luther, Calvin, and Barth share this concern.
- 58 For the distinction and values of Medieval intellectualism and rationalism, see Tobias Hoffman, "Intellectualism and Voluntarism," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (vol. 1; ed. Robert Pasnau; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 414-427.
- 59 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 136.
- 60 Ibid., 137.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *Plato: Complete Works* (ed. John M. Cooper; trans. G.M.A. Grube; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) 1-16.
- 63 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, (vol. 2; ed. Jonathan Barnes; trans. W.D. Ross; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 1552-1728.
- 64 Ibid., 1692-1699; Book XII, 6-9.
- 65 Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* III, 51, in *Contra Gentiles by Thomas Aquinas: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (ed. Joseph P. Kenny; trans. Vernon J. Bourke; New York: Hannover House, 1955-1957). <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles3a.htm#51> (accessed on March 10, 2015). Note especially article 1: "Since it is impossible for a natural desire to be incapable of fulfillment, and since it would be so, if it were not possible to reach an understanding of divine substance such as all minds naturally desire, we must say that it is possible for the substance of God to be seen intellectually, both by separate intellectual substances and by our souls."
- 66 See for example Leo J. Elders, S.V.D., *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1990) 189-192.
- 67 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 7.
- 68 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 138-141, 189-190.
- 69 Hinlicky, *Paths*, 137.
- 70 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, 155.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 165.
- 73 Ibid., 148.
- 74 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 147, n. 51, citing B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 6, 9.
- 75 Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, 55, citing J. Paquer, "Luther," in *Dict. théol. cath.* ix<sup>1</sup>, col. 1251.
- 76 Ibid., 29.
- 77 Ibid., 170.
- 78 Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, 26.
- 79 See here especially Gary Simpson, "'Putting on the Neighbor': The Ciceronian Impulse in Luther's Christian Approach to natural Reason," in *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (ed. Jennifer Hockenberry Dragseth; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 31-38.
- 80 See again Melanchthon, "On Plato," in *Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education* (ed. Sachiko Kusukawa; trans. Christine F. Salazar; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 202-203.
- 81 Thomas D. Pearson, "Luther's Pragmatic Appropriation of the Natural Law Tradition," *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (ed. Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke; Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011) 39-64.
- 82 See for example Melanchthon's "On Philosophy," "On Natural Philosophy," his dedicatory letter to "Epitome of Moral Philosophy," and "On Plato," in *Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education*, 126-132, 133-138, 139-143, and 191-203, respectively.
- 83 See Peterson, *The Humanistic, Fideistic Philosophy of Philip Melanchthon*, 267-286; idem, "Philipp Melanchthon: The First Lutheran Philosopher," in *The Devil's Whore*, 69-75.
- 84 Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, 160; Simpson, "Putting on the Neighbor," 33-38.
- 85 Peterson, *Humanistic, Fideistic Philosophy*, 168-188.
- 86 Luther, WA 15:36, 6, quoted in Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, 145.
- 87 Hinlicky, *Substance* 162.
- 88 Ibid., 165.
- 89 Ibid., 162-168.



- 90 Ibid., 165  
 91 Ibid., 163  
 92 Ibid., 164  
 93 Ibid., 166, n.105.  
 94 Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 10.  
 95 Ibid., 5-7, 10-11.  
 96 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 166, n. 105.  
 97 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 166.  
 98 Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther* (3 vols., trans. James L. Schaaf; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985–93) 1:460.  
 99 LW 35:396.  
 100 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 174-180; *Beloved*, 379-385.  
 101 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, 214-218.  
 102 Ibid., 384.  
 103 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 147.  
 104 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, 384.  
 105 Ibid.  
 106 Hinlicky, *Substance*, 74-180.  
 107 Ibid., 180.  
 108 Hinlicky, *Beloved*, 214, quoting Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1994) 282.  
 109 Ibid., 215.  
 110 Ibid., 217.  
 111 Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) xiii-xvii.

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## Heritage and Hate: Definitions of Nostalgia and the Confederate Flag at Gettysburg Seminary

*Martin Otto Zimmann*

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armistead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think This time. Maybe this time with all this much to lose than all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago. (William Faulkner)<sup>1</sup>

By the time I visited those battlefields, I knew that they had been retrofitted as the staging ground for a great deception, and this was my only security, because they could no longer insult me by lying to me. I knew – and the most important thing I knew was that, somewhere deep within them, they knew it too. (Ta-Nehisi Coates)<sup>2</sup>

The intersection of ecclesia and history once again arrives at the back door of the Old Dorm on Seminary Ridge. The recent racially-charged events, culminating in the horrific attack on a Bible Study group at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston in June of this past Summer urgently reminds those who wrestle with conscience to revisit the unfinished work of healing and reconciliation between black and white folks in this nation. Systemic racism and white privilege enable people who self-identify as white to opt out of confronting the unfinished business of the Civil War, but because conversations about gun control are frustrating and polarizing, the social advocacy networks focused on the removal of the Confederate flag from public lands as a *cause célèbre* around which to rally. Reactions from the defenders of the flag were predictable; echoes of “heritage, not hate” still resound in the public forum.

It would have been easy for President Cooper-White and the administration to write off the presence of the Confederate flag on the Seminary campus as a historical chestnut adding to the charm and lore of Gettysburg as a national shrine, but instead they decided to ban public display of the flag despite the possible repercussions against the institution and the Seminary Ridge Museum which resides in Old Dorm.

That the administration of the ELCA’s oldest seminary had to make this decision at all raises serious questions about the historiography of the Civil War narrative, the Lost Cause, and the re-enactors whose tents cluster around campus buildings from time to time. How did we get here? Why is banning the flag from this campus an appropriate (if not entirely proportional) response to the racial terrorism in Charleston and elsewhere? What other measures must we as a campus and a church take to prevent more violence under the banner of racism? The re-intersection of ecclesia and history at the threshold of Old Dorm provides an opportunity for dialogue and, hopefully, for progress in our common discourse.

### *The Power of Nostalgia and Identity*

To say that nostalgia is a commodity in Gettysburg would be an egregious understatement. Entrepreneurs use every possible means to extract revenue from this physical and rhetorical landscape. “Pickett’s Buffet,” a local restaurant at the end of Steinwehr Avenue is perhaps the most tactless example, having been built adjacent to the left flank of that disastrous charge by 11,000 CSA troops in 1863. Now, busloads of tourists dine in air-conditioned comfort from an array of comfort foods that would make Paula Deen blush, ironically oblivious of the blood-rusted soil beneath the building.

Such is the power of nostalgia to realign memory and historical narrative for commodification purposes.

Nostalgia’s ability to keep Gettysburg among the top tourist destinations in the world deserves a nuanced reading, as it helps us better understand how it came to be that the Seminary administration ended up banning the presence of the Confederate flag on campus. I contend that there are four forms of nostalgia in tension with one another in this place: restorative, imperial, solas-, and reflective. Together they forge a *bricolage* of memories that compete to control the historical narrative not only on the Seminary campus but the narrative of the Civil War itself.

Harvard professor Svetlana Boym carefully parses the contrasts between restorative and reflective nostalgia in her germinal work *The Future of Nostalgia*. This article will later deal at length with the notion of reflective nostalgia as a means for placing the Confederate flag in a proper historical context (i.e.: a museum). What follows in this section is a contextual definition of solastalgia, restorative nostalgia, and imperialist nostalgia which helps us better understand why the meaning of the flag is still contested in this postmodern era.

Restorative nostalgia is the realm of the seemingly victimized; those who feel they have wrongfully suffered at the hands of convoluted and tyrannical plots to destroy the fabric of their social order. Boym cites *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that late nineteenth-century forgery of a Zionist plot to control global finances, as the perfect example of the fruit that restorative nostalgia bears.<sup>3</sup>

As it relates to the Gettysburg historical narrative and the Civil War memory in general, one must recognize that historical revisionists have actively employed restorative nostalgia as the means by which they exonerate and sanctify CSA icons such as Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, or Stonewall Jackson, despite their treasonous actions toward these United States. Furthermore, restorative nostalgics wrench the underlying cause of secession and rebellion from its properly understood place of white supremacy and the right to enslave blacks to the notion of state sovereignty over federal rule. This, coupled with the indignities that defeated Southerners suffered during the turbulent years of Reconstruction and the establishment of citizenship for four million freed people of color, gave birth to the Lost Cause mythology that is so pervasive in the popular memory of the Civil War today. Like Lee and Jackson, the Lost Cause rhetoric has (over time) elevated the place of the Confederate flag to iconic status, making it a talisman for all that the mythology of antebellum civility entails. There was a time immediately following the war that the presence of a CSA flag of any stripe

would have been forbidden in Gettysburg. Agents of restorative nostalgia have successfully re-introduced the flag as a battlefield totem, regardless of how its presence dishonors the sacrifice of Union soldiers buried here.

Restorative nostalgia is the impetus by which men and women recreationally don woolen clothing of the Civil War era to encamp in the Gettysburg summer heat and humidity, ostensibly in order to reclaim and honor their heritage. They trumpet the notion of re-creating an antebellum atmosphere in their encampments, yearning for a gentility and Dixie civility that no longer exists, belying the painful truth that this aura was only possible as the result of the repeated rape, torture, and murder perpetrated upon millions of black bodies in the vast agricultural complex that was the sugarcane and cotton trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It bears repeating that Northern industrialists also benefitted economically from this structure of brutalization and subjugation, as is thoroughly documented in Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. To wit, the strength of our current economic status in the world had its nascent ascendancy in the exploitation of black bodies on lands stolen from red bodies.

Restorative nostalgia is the *modus operandi* by which a small yet vocal group of Dixie apologists seek to divert the common discourse away from the collective sin of slavery and into the realm of their own victimization. The Confederate flag, for them, becomes a symbol of the Lost Cause, not a symbol of white supremacy and hatred. Their mental gymnastics make it possible to distill the essence of the flag *qua* flag into a perfect icon of Margaret Mitchell-esque sentimentality (many slaves *enjoyed* being slaves, they earnestly claim).<sup>4</sup>

Boym contends that this destructive and misleading form of nostalgia provides fuel for conspiracy and the desire to return to a "lost home":

Ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances is thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. "Home", imagine extremist conspiracy theory adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy.... Conspiracy is used pejoratively, to designate a subversive kinship of others, an imagined community based on exclusion more than affection, a union of those who are not with us, but against us.<sup>5</sup>

Yes, the Union soldiers fought a long a bloody war which decimated Southern resources and destroyed millions of improved acres. General Sherman's march to the sea is a wound yet visible on the landscape between Atlanta and Savannah. One can understand a sense of Southern

sentimentality, but that is not a rationale for the heinous practices their ancestors defended.

It is this restorative nostalgic's rationale of victimization and conspiracy that gives voice to those who speak in opposition to the Seminary's decision to ban the presence of the flag on campus. This same distrustful thinking was the *raison d'être* uttered by Dylann Roof before he opened fire: "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go."<sup>6</sup>

In an oddly similar vein, those Civil War buffs who align themselves with the Northern memory or historical discourse often unwittingly aid and abet the politics of Southern restorative nostalgia through their sense of *imperialist nostalgia*, a term coined by American cultural anthropologist, Renato Rosaldo. In their narrative of the war, Union re-enactors long for the romanticized tableaux of the battlefield and the ennobled enemy whose cause was obliterated by the sheer numbers and strength of the industrialized North. Rosaldo illustrates how this wishful thinking belies the horror of war: "The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed.... When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses."<sup>7</sup> Anyone who has any sense of sorrow regarding the end of the antebellum mythos which is inclusive of this nation's history of exploiting and subjugating bodies of color for the good of the white patriarchal ideal is an unwitting adherent of imperialist nostalgia. As historian David Blight contends in the April 8 edition of *The Atlantic*, the military occupation of the south following the war fits well with the parameters of colonial thinking and acting.<sup>8</sup> The Union destroyed the Southern rebellion, but they quickly elevated their defeated enemy to legendary status even as they colonized the South through the military occupation that enforced the tenets of Reconstruction.

Recently, the property north of the Seminary campus, commonly known as Larson's Quality Inn, was sold to the Civil War Trust, a non-profit organization that works to recover and restore Civil War battlefields to their war-time appearance. Their intentions are to raze the hotel surrounding the Thompson house (the site of General Lee's field headquarters subsequent to the CSA occupation of the town in the late afternoon of July 1, 1863). The CWT contends that the site of Lee's headquarters on the battlefield is despoiled by virtue of the surrounding hotel and adjacent restaurant facilities. Their desire is to remove all the post-war edifications in order to restore the land to its pristine condition circa 1863. As of this writing, the CWT's efforts are being hamstrung by Gettysburg Borough government officials

and the Gettysburg Historic Architectural Review Board who are concerned over the future loss of tax revenue and the destruction of arguably historically significant buildings on the site built after the battle.<sup>9</sup>

I am not accusing the Civil War Trust of sympathizing with a white supremacist *casus belli*, but their desire to alter and restore the physical landscape adjacent to the Seminary landscape fits within the parameters of *solastalgia*, which in turn will support the Lost Cause mythology and also the argument against the Seminary's decision to cease public displays of the flag on the campus.

Solastalgia, a neologism coined by Professor Glenn Albrecht of Murdoch University in Western Australia, is used to describe the acute sense of loss or distress that occurs when one's connection to a particular environment is irrevocably truncated by its destruction or alteration.<sup>10</sup> The Thompson property is inextricably entwined with the Lee narrative in and around Gettysburg, and as such becomes a Lost Cause shrine. Whether the Civil War Trust is using solastalgia as a pretext for contributing to the Lost Cause mythology is, admittedly, a matter of speculation, but it will undoubtedly become an even more prevalent shrine of Dixie sympathizers mere yards from the Seminary campus.

Whether by accident or design, the effects of restorative and imperialist nostalgia coupled with solastalgia in a locale such as Gettysburg are more than enough to give people courage to sustain a countervailing narrative to the original meaning behind the Confederate flag. Attempts to co-opt and replace the flag's meaning with a narrative of heritage is tantamount to saying the lynching noose is only a symbol of Southern agriculture. Ta-Nehisi Coates does not equivocate in his June 22 article in *The Atlantic*, stating:

The Confederate flag should not come down because it is offensive to African Americans. The Confederate flag should come down because it is embarrassing to all Americans. The embarrassment is not limited to the flag, itself. The fact that it still flies, that one must debate its meaning in 2015, reflects an incredible ignorance. A century and a half after Lincoln was killed, after 750,000 of our ancestors died, Americans still aren't quite sure why.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of the aforementioned forms of nostalgia and their effects on historical discourse, one can possibly understand why Americans are still negotiating the meaning of the flag in its historical sense. I also understand why, from the vantage point in my living room in North Hall, I sometimes see re-enactors in Southern garb standing outside the Thompson house, as if they expect Robert E. Lee to part the curtains and give them a grandfatherly wave.

### *Reflective Nostalgia and the Seminary Policy on the Confederate Flag*

Reflective nostalgia does not stand in opposition to, but rather envelopes the other forms of nostalgia that shape historical narrative relative to the Seminary campus. Beloved of postmodern thought, it recognizes the danger of dichotomies and absolutes. It cautions against the adoption of a particular narrative. It encourages critical thinking at a personal and collective level. It recognizes the seeming paradox of being simultaneously homesick and sick of home. "Cultural myths then," Boym asserts, "are not lies but rather shared assumptions that help to naturalize history and makes it livable, providing the daily glue of common intelligibility."<sup>12</sup> It is this "daily glue" that recognizes the validity of the "heritage not hate" claim being made by those who wish to display the flag, but also concludes that the need for solidarity with the suffering and disenfranchised members of society takes precedent over other forms of memory. The flag is not simply heritage nor is it simply hate. It is both. Reflective nostalgia places it properly in a multi-faceted symbolic context. Reflective nostalgia was the arena in which seminary officials decided to act against the display of this symbol for the best possible reasons.

The horrific act of domestic terror in Charleston perpetrated against members of Mother Emanuel Church constituted a tipping point for the Seminary administration in terms of being public and vocal about its policy. President Cooper-White, in a July 3 Op-Ed column sharing the rationale for banning the public display of the flag, refers to Bishop Helmut Frenz, recipient of the 1975 United Nations Nansen award for his work among persecuted Chileans under Pinochet. He quotes Frenz as saying, "I try to identify myself with those who are suffering in our world for I find that in giving myself to them I encounter Christ the Lord."<sup>13</sup> Cooper-White lifts up this example as the framework through which he and members of the administration arrived at the decision to ban the presence of the Confederate flag, noting that regardless of the intentions of those who engage in living history, the optics of the flag's presence on the Seminary campus cause further pain to those who need our compassion and solidarity.

It should be noted that the policy to ban the display of the flag was not a knee-jerk response to the events of Charleston. In 2011, the Seminary reversed a policy that had previously banned historical encampments on the campus. This was done in anticipation of the large numbers of visitors that were expected in the area during the 2013 anniversary of the battle. Some of the ensuing encampments of re-enactors displayed the Confederate flag; seminary students and administrators took notice and concern. In 2014, people who self-identified as members of the Ku Klux Klan applied for and

received a permit from the National Park Service to have a public rally on the battlefield near Meade's headquarters on June 29, 2014.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent displays by encampments were met by growing apprehension from students and faculty; the administration enacted a flag-banning policy in the Fall of that year. This Summer's public reiteration of the policy following the Charleston murders was an appropriate gesture of solidarity with those in mourning.

In terms of nostalgia, the decision to ban the flag is an exercise of the reflective variety, imbued with religious and white racial melancholia – those affective valences which permeate the structure of largely homogenous faith-based organizations. To acknowledge the presence of the flag on the campus as problematic also speaks to the unseen presence of the systemic racism that created and sustains an overwhelmingly patriarchal white institution within a majority white Christian denomination.<sup>15</sup> In essence, banning the presence of the flag is necessary because the homogeneity on the campus and the organization with which it is affiliated could possibly be perceived by outsiders as a deliberate act on the part of its constituency – a tacit if not overt endorsement of the worst possible interpretation of the flag's meaning. By banning the flag, the Seminary administration is being not only appropriately reflective, but also prophetic.

This seminary campus is a nexus of nostalgias. For many, it is the place where they answered God's *vocatio*, giving them a sense of meaning and purpose within the context of a theological education. For most, it is the place where the crucial moments of the first day's fight between Union and Confederate soldiers determined the eventual outcome of the Civil War. These overlapping nostalgias exist in tandem and in tension. It is a very Lutheran understanding – the two kingdoms coexisting on the same ground, issuing different yet eerily connected demands on the individual and collective memories of those who choose to ponder it.

The reflective nostalgic recognizes these multiple contexts and seeks to understand the multivalent outcomes of historical and narrative discourse. While those living history re-enactors wish to display the flag as a means of accentuating historical accuracy, they must recognize that this symbol is also a weapon in the arsenal of active racists who seek to reify an overt and public white supremacy the likes of which gave us slavery, the Black Codes, Jim Crow, and Dylann Roof. One hopes that Confederate re-enactors can not only accept the Seminary's new policy with understanding, but also exercise prudence and sensitivity if and when they choose to display the flag in any locale.

Memory of this kind is not personal. Rather, it is subject to a public interpretation, as Boym contends, "Collective memory will be understood ...

as the common landmarks of everyday life. They constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollections. They are folds in the fan of memory, not prescriptions for a model tale."<sup>16</sup> It is within this context that the Seminary administration is given the task of stewarding the "folds in the fan" in order that the public persona of the institution is a rightful elucidation of the moral precepts in keeping with the theology of the cross. As Cooper-White writes,

As we approached the days in which many were coming to Gettysburg to reenact the great events that caused so much suffering a century and a half ago, my colleagues and I who bear responsibility to steward the hallowed grounds on Seminary Ridge determined we could no longer allow public display on our campus of Confederate flag versions that have been used as a form of "hate speech" by various groups. While meanings differ among various groups in our society, these symbols' impact among most African Americans in particular is overwhelmingly negative. To allow their public display in the aftermath of the Charleston murders would signal gross insensitivity and a lack of empathy for the families of those gunned down, for our own students, staff and alumni of color, and for millions of our fellow citizens. In a time when those wearied by the ongoing wars of racism are groping for signs of hope, it's time to take down symbols that wound rather than heal.

The Seminary administration are stewards of the campus. Moreover, they are stewards of the historical discourse emanating from the campus. As such, the establishment of the Seminary Ridge Museum in 2013 is a long overdue effort to show how Old Dorm was used both as a hospital and a place where the exchange of ideas fomented a yearning to understand the moral and ethical implications of human bondage on this continent. The building has been retrofitted with 20,000 square feet of interactive displays and is home to "Citizens at Crossroads," a dramatic presentation that provokes thought and conversation by audience participants.<sup>17</sup>

The stated purpose of the museum is to challenge the assumptive narrative of the romanticized Battle of Gettysburg and replace it with a more nuanced narrative revealing the horrific consequences of slavery, war, and the unfinished business of reconciliation in our national conversations about race and ethnicity. By experiencing the permanent exhibit, one can have a better understanding of the intersection between faith and history.

The average non-battlefield park-affiliated tourist stop in Gettysburg does not invoke reflective nostalgia. Sadly, tourism in Gettysburg runs the

banal gamut of ghost tours (also banned on the Seminary campus) to wineries that tip the hat in the direction of the nineteenth century. Boym levels harsh criticism at this form of historical commodification: “This is an American way of dealing with the past – to turn history into a bunch of amusing and readily available souvenirs, devoid of politics. More provocative would be to refer to the emblems of the divided past, especially imagery of segregation.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than giving in to the temptation of commodifying history for the sake of gain, the museum experience provides space for introspection and growth. The exhibit’s narrative challenges visitors to think about the unfinished business of reconciliation.

The Seminary Ridge Museum is a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, whose members include America’s Black Holocaust Museum, Syrians Without Borders, and the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, to name just a few. The organization leadership defines itself as such: “We are sites, individuals, and initiatives activating the power of places of memory to engage the public in connecting past and present in order to envision and shape a more just and humane future.”<sup>19</sup>

Yes, the museum does have representations of the Confederate flag visible in its permanent exhibit, perhaps most noticeable in the Dale Gallon murals. This placement is not an endorsement of political ideology, but rather the proper historical context by which people can learn about the complexities of our past and present racial discourse in America. In similar fashion America’s Black Holocaust Museum displays photos of lynchings, the Syrian Oral History Project illustrates the horrors of chemical warfare, and the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica preserves the narratives of victims in the Columbian armed conflict despite the graphic brutalities contained therein. These displays are not endorsements, but needful reminders of the dreadful acts of which humanity is capable in order that we as a species might better ourselves and move beyond violence into a new and better paradigm of peaceful and just coexistence. Within the realm of reflective nostalgia, symbols of hate are transformed into warnings for future generations.

### Hoc est Corpus

From a theological standpoint, we are reminded that all members of the church do not exist in isolation but are interconnected through the claim that baptism has upon us. We are the body of Christ in all times and places. Those people whose lives were irrevocably changed through their time on the Seminary campus, whether through matriculation or warfare, also share an inter-connectedness. Together, the collective memories of soldiers,

students, visitors, and families who have spent time on the ridge form the narrative of the seminary campus body. The emotional valence felt by anyone who spends time on this hallowed ground is an inscription upon the campus corpus. It is a living and ongoing history, replete with narratives of Samuel Simon Schmucker, those of the graduating members of the class of 2015, and everyone in between. This body also bears the scars of battle – extant buildings are pockmarked. The ground contains fragments of projectiles and bones, similar to the bodies of wounded veterans. The museum’s halls are haunted by echoes of broken men, sparked in the imagination by the startling tableaux in its rooms. This ground compels the Seminary students, faculty, and staff to reflect and bear witness to the suffering and resilience of humanity. In order to do so properly, one must proceed with utmost caution and sensitivity.

As Michael Cooper-White has rightfully lifted up Bishop Frenz as a model for compassion, we must carefully deconstruct the meaning of Frenz’s statement wherein he strives to “identify with those who are suffering” in order to find a Christological response to this world’s warring madness. Like Frenz, most of us associated with the current main embodiment of the Lutheran Church in America (the ELCA) and this seminary operate from a place of privilege within the confines of a postcolonial/postmodern context. Many of us passively accept the white supremacist patriarchy from which we have benefitted in myriad ways without even knowing it. Most of us do not spend much time thinking about our status as a largely homogenous denomination or the reasons why.

While Bishop Frenz raises the bar for Christians seeking to be in solidarity with the suffering, I would caution against those who interpret the words “identify with” as an attempt on anyone’s part to dis-identify with one’s own narrative in order to gain the authentic experience of the disenfranchised. From the place of white privilege, it cannot be done. We can show solidarity and acts of empathy. We can advocate for peace with justice and immerse ourselves in accounts of the oppressed. The painful caveat is this: we who are beneficiaries of white patriarchal hegemony in this culture can never truly identify with the suffering. We can only hope to be present with them in their suffering and work to end their suffering (by speaking and acting from our place of power), as I believe the life and witness of Bishop Frenz among the people of Chile testifies.

I would hasten to add that the Museum’s effort to lift the history out of the archive and place it in our contemporary social consciousness is laudable yet imperfect by virtue of reflective nostalgia’s definition. This is to say, no matter how well we prepare to identify with historical soldier’s bodies, or black bodies, or the corporate body of the seminary campus, we cannot

accurately imbibe the abject feelings of terror and agony that warfare, slavery, or the emotional valence of a landscape entail. At best we can only have a momentary encounter with something akin to the anxiety felt by the original bodies, but then resume our daily lives once the momentary suspension of disbelief is over. Nostalgia is always longing for that which never can be realized, not that which is objectively true.

Some would argue that this sort of logic is reductionist and that it is better to attempt solidarity via melancholia in its various permutations than simply shrugging off the burden of history and blithely consuming our way through the “Gettysburg experience.” However, we cannot ask people to identify with historical bodies and not prepare to be disappointed by their own cognitive dissonance. The body cannot possibly replace the archive or become a totally accurate “site of knowledge production” because it cannot *know* what a soldier, a slave, or the seminary corpus experienced over time.

One could argue that nothing in the archive or repertoire could possibly achieve this sense of *gnosis* in the site of production. This is a given. Perhaps it is the immersion of one’s self into the physical presence of the campus or the museum that evokes more than a reading of W.E.B. DuBois or a viewing of *Twelve Years a Slave*. When a person attempts to identify with the narrative of the subjugated other, certain assumptions are made – *this is what it might have felt like. This is how a wounded soldier felt. This is how the slaves made their way north. This is the experience of hallowed ground.* Such assumptions are erroneous and do a disservice to the memory of the suffering. Grief is appropriate. Reverence and respect emanate from the better angels of our nature.

If we are to be in solidarity with the suffering of those past and present, then preparation must take place with some fundamental caveats in orientation, namely, by stating that imagined experience is a shallow facsimile of the horrific reality. We can never hope to achieve the authenticity of what African American Studies Professor Dwight McBride describes as former slave Mary Prince’s “politics of experience,” or author Ta-Nehisi Coates’ terror while being pulled over by the police in Prince Georges County.<sup>20</sup> Our attempts at dis-identification cannot hold currency with the actual narrative or *martyria* of one who lived the experience. McBride references Karl Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism in order to further elucidate these contrasting accounts of the living bodies superimposed as the racial other versus the actual accounts of former slaves such as Mary Prince:

Marx’s remarks are useful in accounting for the “value” of Prince’s real slave experience, represented by the “social hieroglyphic” that is her narrative. Prince’s very awareness of the process of witnessing, with its

accompanying issues of mediation, puts her in a position to trade on her experience in a manner that authorizes her as the best person to speak about slavery.<sup>21</sup>

No amount of orientation, even with caveats, can elevate a present-day body to the value of Mary Prince’s narrative. Our efforts to comprehend Prince’s experience via our hearing or reading of a text falls short as well. Similarly, removing the Confederate flag from the campus corpus is a commendable action, but this alone fails to place us in true identification with the collective experience of those who died on this ridge during the battle, or people of color who suffer pain at the sight of this racist symbol.

At the memorial service for the Reverend Clementa Pinckney (a graduate of a sister ELCA seminary), President Barack Obama spoke prophetically about the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina Capitol grounds. Those remarks bear repeating, as they are applicable to this moment in the Seminary’s collective narrative:

By taking down that flag, we express God’s grace. But I don’t think God wants us to stop there. For too long, we’ve been blind to the way past injustices continue to shape the present. Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty, or attend dilapidated schools, or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career. Perhaps it causes us to examine what we’re doing to cause some of our children to hate. Perhaps it softens hearts towards those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal justice system and leads us to make sure that that system is not infected with bias; that we embrace changes in how we train and equip our police so that the bonds of trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve make us all safer and more secure.<sup>22</sup>

In these remarks, the President issues a challenge to move beyond banning the flag and re-shaping our cultural narrative in order to abandon the romantic and mythological notions of history. This moment calls for the Seminary to redouble efforts to raise awareness of privilege and systemic racism. Courses on ethnic and gender awareness and sensitivity can be added to the curriculum. Worship practices can continue to celebrate and lift up diversity and prophetic witness of the marginalized. Most importantly, the Seminary can propose a benchmark for diversity within the ranks of the faculty and the student body, setting a precedent for this denomination. These are not *sui generis* challenges or ideas, but the

constellation of race-related issues in our current culture renew a call for action among the faithful.

Banning the display of the flag is a first step. Reflective nostalgia is a means by which the Seminary must create a learning environment where students encounter moments of conscientization; they must understand how systemic racism helps white people unwittingly benefit from privilege. Understanding race as a socio-historical concept for the use of economic gain and exploitation can create a sea change in the way rostered leaders of the ELCA approach exegesis and exhortation of gospel truths. By bravely confronting white fragility and denial, we can recreate the church where all are welcome and none are considered inferior by virtue of ethnicity. Banning the flag is a first step in a long and difficult journey. bell hooks defines these challenges in no uncertain terms:

As a nation, we have made little transformative progress to eradicate sexism and racism precisely because most citizens of the United States believe in their heart of hearts that it is natural for a group or an individual to dominate over others. Most folks do not believe that it is wrong to dominate, oppress, and exploit other people. Even though marginalized groups have greater access to civil rights in this society than in many societies in the world, our exercise of these rights has done little to change the overall cultural assumption that domination is essential to the progress of civilization, to the making of social order.<sup>23</sup>

As students in the Seminary struggle to define their identity, those who self-identify as white need to confront their own instances of passive, if not active, racism in their own narratives and how they contribute to the collective narrative which sustains white hetero-normative patriarchal supremacy. Reflective nostalgia provides opportunities for introspection and *metanoia* when these moments are remembered and seen in light of a new critical awareness of privilege contrasted with disenfranchisement.

This campus corpus, perhaps more than any other seminary campus in the United States, is the witness of humanity's best and worst selves. Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, we who live in this time and space must hold the past accountable for the countless incidents of assault, rape, and murder perpetrated against people of color by those white people of both the South *and* North whose ideology was lived out under the Confederate flag. We must rally against efforts to discredit the true narrative of Southern Secession. We must remember the failure on the part of our ecclesial ancestors to recognize difference without judgment, allowing for

segregation among churches that plagues us even still. We can no longer be complacent or complicit in the disenfranchisement of those who are disproportionately prosecuted under the law by virtue of skin color and gross assumptions. We must move beyond fragility and fear into tentative steps of dialogue, reparation, and reconciliation, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.

We will know we have arrived at that place of healing and wholeness when the Faulkner quote of Southern yearning will be a relic of an archaic culture. We will know that the church is unified under a banner of complete racial inclusivity when people of color like Ta-Nehisi Coates can visit this campus and the surrounding battlefield and no longer feel insulted by the occlusion of truth by a romanticized notion of a just Southern cause for self-determination. Rather, the narrative of the battlefield will show that Union soldiers fought and died here to truncate the Southern narrative of white supremacy and violence perpetrated on black bodies. This campus, museum, chapel, and classrooms bear witness to the truth. Banning the Confederate flag is the first step – an expression of God's grace. But as President Obama rightly prophesied, God does not want us to stop there.

### Notes

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- 23 bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 200.

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## O Taste and See that God is Good

*Michael Allwein*

*This noteworthy homily was offered by Pastor Michael Allwein at the memorial service for Salud Galapia Nieting, widow of the late Professor of Old Testament, Lorenz Nieting on May 9, 2015. Texts for the memorial service, which took place at St. James Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, included 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 and John 3:14-21, but Salud's wishes were for her pastor to preach on a single text, Psalm 34:8.*

Thirteen days before Salud Nieting died on December 28, 2014, I sat with her for lunch. We sat together at that small table in front of the windows over-looking her yard, the table so many of you may have sat at for a meal, or actually, more often that table was filled with food, for larger meals she was having at her home.

The main reason we were having lunch together that day was to discuss her funeral service. Basically, everything we are doing here today is what she had written on the papers I walked out of her house with that day. She was clear. She was resolute. She was determined, and one of the very last things she said to me before I left her home that day was this: "Don't allow my funeral to turn into a circus!" And I knew what she meant: "no people getting up and saying all kinds of nice things about her. I want a worship service," she said, "not a circus!"

Of course, she had written down clear music selections and specific scripture readings; but she also included what she called "the sermon text," the scripture from which I "must" preach this morning. And so, the "sermon text" for today is this: Psalm 34, verse 8. Here is the one verse: "O taste and see that God is good; happy are those who take refuge in God."

So this morning, I will entrust you with the Corinthians text, to bask in the image of God's mercy we carry within us as a treasure in clay jars, all because of God's love.

And I likewise entrust you with the Gospel text, which includes the profound John 3:16 verse, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who lives in him may not perish but may have eternal life*” [John 3:16].

So ... a word about Psalm 34. It is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for God’s protection at times of illness and other dangers. Perhaps we are hearing the ultimate word of hope to those who are in need, trusting God to be there, especially in oppressive situations.

So it is within that context that we hear verse 8: “*O taste and see that God is good; happy are those who take refuge in God.*” This one verse is simply jam-packed with images. The word translated as “*taste*” means “*to try something by experiencing it.*” It is almost as if the psalmist is daring the hearers to try God’s goodness for themselves and experience it as one would taste a new food. You know what it is like if someone dares you to try sushi or squid or those Harry Potter jelly beans with those strange flavors.

Here, we are being dared to experience God for ourselves and to let our taste buds savor the goodness of God! What an exciting and thought-filled image!

Verse 8 then ends with the words, “*Happy are those who take refuge in God.*” “*Take refuge*” can also be translated “*to hide oneself.*” I easily picture my grandson who when he gets out of the bathtub, all he wants is to be wrapped in a big, soft towel and held close – protected, warm and loved.

The word “*happy*” is found 25 times in the psalms. Sometimes, it is translated “*blessed*,” other times as “*happy*.” Again, the image is exciting and profound! Take refuge in God, allow yourself to be wrapped in God, feeling protected, blessed, happy, contented and loved – not only in this world but in the life to come!

In this one verse from Psalm 34, what I hear is this: I hear *blessing* and I hear *praise for God*. But above all, I hear an *invitation!*

Now I really do not know exactly why Salud picked this one tiny verse for today, but if I can be presumptuous, I will say because in some way it defined her spiritual journey. And now, I will be really presumptuous and suggest that it defines the spiritual journey for each one of us.

Taking refuge in God in today’s world is fraught with danger, especially in a world where it can seem like utter foolishness to even sometimes believe that God is good.

And if, indeed, this was Salud’s journey, might there be an invitation today to recognize this is our journey as well – to want to taste God in the very depth of our being; to wish to be wrapped, and content, and protected by God.

We also need to know that God does not love us because we are good. God loves us because God is good. Let’s taste God’s goodness together today, truly knowing that nothing we do will inhibit, direct, decrease, or increase God’s eagerness to love.

Finally, a final word of liturgical trivia. Every three years we use Psalm 34 in worship on a Sunday morning ... on *All Saints’ Day*, the day we remember those saints who have gone before us. I’d like to conclude my message with a prayer we use on that same *All Saints’ Day*. The prayer is this:

*Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ ... grant us the grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment ... grant us the grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment. ...*

I think I hear an invitation! Amen.

*Michael Allwein serves as Lead Pastor at St. James Lutheran Church in Gettysburg. He was ordained in 1980, serving congregations and college campuses in Gettysburg, Lancaster, Shippenburg, and Chambersburg. He has a B.S. in Education, an M.S. degree in Mental Health Counseling as well as the M.Div. degree. He is a Board Certified Counselor and certified Spiritual Director, leading group spiritual direction and a member of the teaching staff for the hybrid model of spiritual direction training through Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development.*

## I am the Younger Son

*Mark Oldenburg*

*The Rev. Dr. Mark Oldenburg preached this noteworthy sermon on the first part of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24) September 9, 2015, in the Church of the Abiding Presence, the campus chapel. It was one response to an ELCA wide emphasis to observe a “Day of Confession, Repentance, and Commitment to End Racism,” and reflects the broader discussions of the symbols and manifestations of racism in the United States.*

I know, I know. That’s only half of the parable, and we’re missing the pay-off and punchline. But on this day we, or at least I, need to hear this half of the parable. It’s very easy for me to identify with the elder son – dutiful, sullen, and joyless. It’s very easy, then, for me to think that it’s someone else’s job to repent and convert, and mine simply to welcome them home. But today we are, or at least I am, the younger brother.

The bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, echoed by the ELCA’s Bishop Eaton have called on worshiping communities in America to set aside this week for “confession, repentance, and commitment to end racism,” in response to the murders this summer in Charleston. That is not an activity I need to stand by and celebrate when others (finally) do. It is one I need wholly to enter into myself.

I know that I am a person of unclean lips and that I belong to a people of unclean lips. I am a part of many “we’s” who are guilty of racism. If I share in the pride at American ideals of “liberty and justice for all,” I must also share in the guilt when that liberty and that justice are systematically denied to some. If I bask in my connection with the ELCA youth who performed tireless service at the Gathering this summer in Detroit, then I also bask in my connection with Dylann Storm Roof, the ELCA youth who apparently committed the Charleston murders. For being part of corporate sin, I need to confess and repent. But wait, there’s more.

I know that, along with my delight in friends from other cultures, is a suspicion and fear of others as well that is all the more powerful for being involuntary. I know that when walking alone on the streets of my Baltimore neighborhood, I react differently upon seeing a white man coming toward me than a man of color. It doesn’t lessen my sin or my shame to know that that reaction is shared by almost all Americans of every race. That knowledge simply gives me company; it does not make our sin any the less. And I know that the involuntary racism of others gives me privileges not shared by others. So I am called to confess and repent. But wait, there’s more.

I know that Dylann Roof spent his formative years in an ELCA congregation, and I know that I did not do all that I could, as a pastor and a catechist, to fortify those in my charge against the demonic lures of racism, resentment and hate. Roof was not one of my catechumens, but he well might have been; I have failed others as I might have failed him. So I am called to repent and confess. But wait, there’s more. But you get the idea.

I am the younger son in the parable, taking my patrimony – the inheritance of the prodigal love of the Father, who made of one blood all humanity. I am the younger son, wasting that patrimony in riotous living of racism and sloth (I always thought riotous living would be more fun than this). I am the younger son.

And when disaster strikes, when the fruits of my wasting become mature and apparent, I (we?) come back, not demanding forgiveness as a right, not saying others were worse, not trusting in formulas, although I may use them, simply telling the truth: I have sinned against heaven and you, my Father; I do not deserve to be called your son. We come telling the truth, and hoping against hope for open arms.

And getting them.

Spoiler alert! In a few minutes we will take part in a service of confession, and that confession will include forgiveness and absolution. We will be welcomed back, although we do not deserve it. The ministry of Christ, the love of the Father, the community of the Holy Spirit cover and welcome us. We – even we – are reconciled with God and with one another. The One whose clothes at the cross were confiscated and divided among his enemies puts a robe around our sinking shoulders. The One who thirsted on the cross brings us barbecue.

And we are home.

We will be absolved, reconciled with God and with one another.

But we can fairly predict that that absolution will not eliminate our involuntary prejudice. It will not erase the systemic racism that pervades our world, and it won’t stop us from going back into that world.

It may, however, keep reminding us that that world, controlled by racism and all its sibling hatreds, is not our home – it is a foreign land. Our home is with the God who made of one blood all the nations of the earth. It is with the God who shows no partiality toward human divisions. We go into that foreign land with the values, the character, the loyalties of home. {It was perhaps the younger son's most serious offense that he made himself at home in the foreign land and, when his neighbors needed his patrimony to see them through the famine, he had nothing to share with them.)

We don't belong in that land of separation from our God. We've been claimed and re-identified, even if we forget it, even if we don't believe it.

In a few minutes as well, we'll be singing the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The first time I ever sang that song was in a congregation on Long Island, where the only white faces in the congregation belonged to me and the pastor's family. The congregation joined hands to sing the song; I was the only one in the room who needed to read the words, but that didn't lessen the warmth of the congregation's welcome and inclusion of me. I reveled in the experience and the words, until we came to the phrase, "Haven't our weary feet come to the place for which our parents sighed?" And I thought, "No! Being the only white face in the room? Holding hands with African Americans they didn't even know? My parents worked their whole life to *avoid* being in this place!" And then I realized that I was wrong. Every time my parents affirmed the creed, and declared that they believed in the communion of saints, they sighed to be where I was. Every time they communed, they sighed to be where I was. They did not know it, they might have denied it if asked, but that room was for them a home longed for during their exile in a foreign land.

And bringing the values and character of our Father's home into the foreign land in which we lead our lives is what we're called to do. The AME bishops called on religious communities not simply to repent and confess, but to commit to end racism. Welcomed by God, we can recognize and fight against involuntary prejudice in ourselves and others. We can speak with credibility against the powers of racism as those who, but for the grace of God, would be in unrecognized bondage to them.

No one whose life began in the font, dying and rising with Christ, can be held forever a prisoner of racism, not as a victim, and not as a perpetrator. Our home and our dignity are with the God who made of one blood all humanity. Purified, commissioned, empowered, we venture into the strange and foreign land, where God is already at work setting creation free.

And there we ask, joyfully and humbly, "How can I help?"

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## BOOK REVIEW

### Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers

*Michael L. Long (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015)*

*Reviewed by Kathy Vitalis Hoffman*

When I taught Kindergarten in the early 80's, my colleagues and I would jokingly describe our students as either a Mister Rogers kid or a Sesame Street kid. The Mister Rogers child would portray calmer behaviors and reflect the characteristics of the more soft spoken Mister Rogers. Mister Rogers may have been soft spoken and portrayed a kind demeanor but this by no means indicates that he was shallow or lacked convictions. On the contrary, and as Michael Long claims in his book, *Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers*, Fred Rogers had strong beliefs as they relate to nonviolence and practices of peace and justice.

Long demonstrates a thorough understanding of Fred Rogers and documents his description of him with many examples from Rogers' program, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, as well as speeches, books, letters and sermons. In this portrait of Rogers, Long provides an evenhanded look at Rogers, shedding light on the seeming silence Rogers took on issues such as homosexuality and to some degree race. Rogers was no "wild-eyed Abbie Hoffman during the Vietnam War" nor did he march for peace. (7) On the other hand, in reference to the Vietnam War and the first season of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Long wrote that "in the quiet of a television studio, behind the staring eye of a camera, Rogers was a leading peace activist in his own right, intent on showing the beauty and power of peacemaking to children and adults mired in a war with no end in sight." (7)

The beauty and power of peacemaking was especially evident in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, and it is there, I believe, that the

countercultural Mister Rogers made the most impact. This Neighborhood of Make-Believe is an excellent example of the way followers of Jesus can enact peaceable behaviors that are relevant and possible in a violent culture.

Long reminds his readers of the historical context that countered the neighborhood of make-believe. For example, Rogers' program hit the national market in the midst of the Viet Nam War as the antiwar movement was growing. In February of 1968, the theme for this first week related to war and peace. In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Lady Elaine Fairchilde causes unwanted changes to the landscape causing conflict with the head of Make-Believe, King Friday XIII. As the conflict grows it is referenced as war and even leads to attempts to draft characters to take sides and use force. Fortunately Lady Aberlin introduces a plan to bring peace and with the help of others works to carry it out. As Long indicates, this episode demonstrates the effectiveness of creative strategies and how they can be worked into peaceful outcomes to conflict.

Long introduces his readers to Rogers' psychology of peace with a look at a week's theme, "mad feelings." These episodes aired in 1995 shortly after O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of murder. We learn from Mister Rogers that it's "okay to be angry, but it's not okay to hurt ourselves or others." (46) In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe anger is normalized through the characters actions so that the television audience learns the difference between the right and wrong ways to respond to anger. Lady Elaine is persuaded by her longtime friend Betty Okonak Templeton to stop her violent actions by returning to the activities she enjoys, which is playing music on steel pans and making clay sculptures. (54) An adult viewer of these episodes may not immediately recognize the countercultural impact of this message. Upon further reflection, however, one may remember that most children's programs follow the narrative of violence so that good wins over evil. The enemy is pursued and conquered. In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe the story explores ways to function in the midst of challenges and feelings of anger.

Through the characters in the neighborhood of make-believe we are introduced to the possibility of personal transformation. Unlike Sesame Street's Oscar the Grouch who stays a grouch, King Friday can be persuaded to change his mind and his actions. We meet the once-wild-but-now-tamed Daniel Striped Tiger realizing that even make-believe characters have baggage and the potential to change. In addition, in Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, the characters are more nuanced and the good and bad are in the mix. Yes, we have Lady Elaine being simultaneously a saint and a sinner.

This book is worth reading for any Christian. As we claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace, we also seek ways to practice peace in our daily

lives. A visit to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe has the potential to "Make what we Believe" a reality.

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## Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition

*Roger E. Olson and Christin T. Collins Winn (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015)*  
 Reviewed by Kelsey L. Fitting-Snyder

What is Pietism? This question has haunted me since my first semester of seminary because there is no good answer. What I have learned is that this question means different things to different people in different time periods throughout church history. Yet, throughout this book, Olson and Collins Winn argue that while Pietism has developed a negative connotation over the years, it would be possible by reclaiming its originally intended ethos and hallmarks for Pietism to have a great impact on Christian theology and living today.

Olson and Collins Winn argue that within our 21<sup>st</sup> century context Pietism has taken on a life of its own, and over the years has been placed into very specific boxes described as: individualistic, introverted, emotional, quietist, and holier-than-thou. But Olson and Collins Winn tackle these misconceptions in the first chapter, “Defining and Redefining Pietism,” where they explore the criticisms of Albrecht Ritschl and Karl Barth. Olson and Collins Winn write, “Pietism is not what many people think it is,” claiming that the criticisms of Ritschl and Barth have driven many of the misconceptions of Pietism today, while the criticisms themselves actually fail to address Pietism’s core ethos.

In order to understand fully how Pietism has been wrongly defined, Olson and Collins Winn offer its complex history in four chapters: “2. Pietist Backgrounds”; “3. Reforming the Reformation: Part I”; “4. Reforming the Reformation: Part 2”; and, “5. A Portrait of Pietism.” Olson and Collins Winn offer in chapter two “precursors” and “cousins” to pietism noting, for example, the works of Johann Arndt, and Jakob Böhme. To generalize, these early catalysts of Pietism were craving a deeper devotion and relationship with God, and a more radical love of neighbor.

One cannot talk about the history of Pietism without key players Philipp Jakob Spener, and August Hermann Francke. Much of the Pietism that Olson and Collins Winn draw from is that of Spener and Francke. They recount Spener’s emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers” and his work

*Pia Desideria*, which they claim laid the groundwork for the key hallmarks of Pietism. Olson and Collins Winn then develop Francke’s understanding of a “true inward conversion,” outline his education work, and his work at Halle. One important aspect to note is that these two key figures were not interested in leaving the church like some of the radicals, which Olson and Collins Winn address in chapter four.

One of the biggest takeaways from this middle section of historical development is what Olson and Collins Winn name as the “authentic hallmarks” of Pietism that include: the embrace and acceptance of orthodox Protestant Christian doctrine, experiential transformative Christianity, conversion (the regeneration of the “inner person”), conversional piety (strong devotional life and personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ crucified and risen), visible Christianity (holy living and transformed character), love of the Bible, Christian life lived in community, world transformation toward the kingdom of God, ecumenical, irenic Christianity, and the common priesthood of true believers. (85) A key aspect of these hallmarks is that many movements in Christianity embrace these very pillars, but Olson and Collins Winn demonstrate that within Pietism these hallmarks are emphasized and connected to one another in distinct ways.

To bring pietism into the 21<sup>st</sup> century Olson and Collins Winn first identify in chapter six, “Where Pietism flourished on New Soil,” the impact the movement had on Christianity in Great Britain and North America. They then spend time in chapter seven, “Pietism for a New Era,” describing the reinvention and rethinking of pietism by theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard. Within the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were conflicting reinventions of Pietism, but Olson and Collins Winn make it clear that despite these conflicts, some of the key hallmarks remained. Chapter eight, “Contemporary Appropriations of the Pietist’s Impulse,” highlights the work of four theologians, Donald G. Bloesch (United Church of Christ, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*), Richard Foster (Quaker, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*), Stanley J. Grenz (Evangelical Theologian, *The Matrix of Christian Theology*), and Jürgen Moltmann (German Reformed Theologian, *Theology of Hope*). While not all of these theologians are thought of as Pietists, what Olson and Collins Winn demonstrate is that the hallmarks of Pietism are present within their work, and thus have made an impact on contemporary Christianity.

The final argument of this book brings together the hallmarks of Pietism, and how they are linked with Evangelical Christianity. It is important for Olson and Collins Winn to let the evangelical reader understand that part of the tradition is rooted in Pietism and it is an aspect that should

not be neglected and over looked. Olson and Collins Winn identify that Evangelical Theology is rooted in “head belief” and “heart experience.” The culmination of doctrine and devotion is a hallmark of both Evangelical thought and Pietism, in which the “heart experience of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit... informs belief.” (182) As a non-evangelical Christian, I would argue that this book also speaks to Christianity as a whole. Pietism has deep roots within many Protestant traditions (as noted throughout the book), and by claiming that, we (non-evangelicals) open ourselves up to a deeper relationship with God, a deeper understanding of our neighbor, and ultimately a deeper understanding of what it means to be in ministry with one another. By recognizing its Pietist roots, Evangelical Christianity, and I would argue Christianity as a whole, is offered a chance at renewal; a strengthening of the church both spiritually and theologically.

I would recommend this book to anyone, like myself, who is afraid of the word Pietism. If anything, this book offers an appreciation, and new understanding for what it means to be searching for an authentic Christianity, which lies at the heart of Pietism.

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## POETRY + THEOLOGY

## Up to Our Armpits

*Katy Giebenhain*

In the movie theater, in the midst of the sensory-charge that is *Mission: Impossible Rogue Nation*, I couldn't help but think of a ballet I had seen the week before. Two men in t-shirts and cargo pants executed a choreographed response to wounded warriors – soldiers returning from experiences they are not prepared to process – physically, mentally or spiritually. “Exit Wounds... and Then They Come Home”<sup>1</sup> was performed by the Washington D.C.-based Chamber Dance Project. We were near the stage and the German next to me commented on the dancers' *Körperbeherrschung*. The performance impressed me more than the airplane scene or the series of feats Tom Cruise and his colleagues pull off in the latest MI offering. It was live. Physically improbable yet possible. And instead of a soundtrack, a string quartet played pieces by Philip Glass on the edge of the stage.

*Körperbeherrschung* means physical control or discipline. A *Körper* is a body. *Beherrschung* is control, mastery, restraint, governing. You get the picture. I did not expect to find “Exit Wounds” so effective, or contemporary ballet such a perfect choice to convey the theme. Another thing I did not expect but found utterly compelling was the company's structured improvisation. Directly before curtain, the founder and artistic director Diane Coburn Bruning gives the dancers directions for a structured improvisation, and she hands the musicians a score they have never played together. Coming off of “Exit Wounds” I couldn't help but think of the inherent “structured improvisation” of war, of the tension between rules and chaos, hierarchy and ingenuity. And despite being fresh and elegantly-fun, and involving more dancers and musicians (they were good sports – imagine playing the violin and a dancer picks up your music stand, so you have to follow across the stage and continue playing in the middle of the performance), there is plenty of *Körperbeherrschung* going on here, too, balancing control with spontaneity.

Both performances opened up the ordinary in a way that reminded me of strong sermons and poems. And all of this reminded me of something I heard at a creative writing conference, during an editorial panel on “the slushpile.”<sup>2</sup> One of the journal editors was answering a question about work that “rises to the top,” the kind of prose and poems they are on the lookout to publish when sorting through massive amounts of submissions. What do they want? She said “... an observation about the world that I wouldn’t have made myself but I know to be true when I hear it.” As soon as she said this I thought about how true it is for good preaching. We recognize the genuine in all forms and styles.

This recognition can be hearing something familiar from a direction you did not expect, especially when it is a well-executed example of that balance between control and energy/spontaneity. I did not reckon with cargo pants and war-zone content at a summer ballet festival. When someone nudges us in a direction we weren’t looking – and we come to conclusions ourselves, it can be more memorable, and it can take us deeper.

The late Jim Wayne Miller described what he sought to evoke when dealing with ordinary things in poems:

“Growing up in North Carolina, I was often amused, along with other natives, at tourists who fished the trout streams. The pools, so perfectly clear, had a deceptive depth. Fishermen unacquainted with them were forever stepping into what they thought was knee-deep water and going in up to their waists or even their armpits, sometimes being floated right off their feet. I try to make poems like those pools, so simple and clear their depth is deceiving. I want the writing to be so transparent that the reader forgets he is reading and is aware only that he is having an experience. He is suddenly plunged deeper than he expected and comes up shivering.”<sup>3</sup>

When I listen to a good sermon, this is how I feel. Show me that pool. Take me to it. Float me off my feet.

## Notes

- 1 “Exit Wounds... and Then They Come Home” August 7, 2015. Chamber Dance Project. Performed by Davit Hovhannisyan and Jacob Bush at The Joyce Theater 2015 Ballet Festival, New York, NY. Music: Philip Glass. Choreography: Diane Coburn Bruning.
- 2 Panel “Slush Pile Standouts: Thoughts from the Editor’s Desk,” 2015 Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair in Minneapolis, MN, April 11, 2015.
- 3 Jim Wayne Miller, on his poetry accessed September 1, 2015. [www.jimwaynemiller.net](http://www.jimwaynemiller.net).

## *We Welcome Our Poets*

This issue includes poems by Pamela Wynn (Minnesota), Mark Burrows (Germany), Thomas Alan Holmes (Tennessee), David Axelrod (Oregon), Maryanne Hannan (New York), Lynette Leini-Grandell (Minnesota), Jim Wayne Miller (Kentucky), Kate Peper (California) and Eric Stenman (Pennsylvania). Book Recommendations are for *Out of the Depths: Poetry of Poverty, Courage and Resilience* edited by Susan Deborah King, *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* by Frank X. Walker, *Old and Lost Rivers* by J.T. Ledbetter and *Telling the Bees* by Faith Shearin.

## Book Recommendations

### *Out of the Depths: Poetry of Poverty, Courage and Resilience*

Taking its title from Psalm 130, *Out of the Depths* is edited by Susan Deborah King in cooperation with the Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary in New York. The Poverty Initiative is the core program of the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice at Union.

Poverty makes the simplest acts in the course of the day a relentless struggle. This anthology calls out struggle. It names barriers these writers show us and struggle against – seen and invisible, rural and urban, from children and adult perspectives with contributions from emerging and well-known poets. *Out of the Depths* is a book of memory and energy. Poetry is an apt form to turn to for the repetitions and realities of struggle. Check out “Washboard Wizard Highland, Kansas 1888 by Marilyn Nelson, “Polenta” by Marsha Mentzer, “Faces” by Michael Glaser, “A Dozen Reasons to Give up Haggling over the Price of Weavings” by Roseann Lloyd, “A Little Bit of Timely Advice” by Mekeel McBride and “Food Drive” by Scott Hutchison. The group poem “What Helps” is a good choice of a final poem. Here is an evocative poem by Mary Krane Derr:

Broke

Over the burst yellowed futon  
the shutoff fan of 4 blades  
perennially minus 1  
give the bold outstretching shadow  
of that giant Jesus in Rio. (45)

In the business world there is much talk of glass *ceilings* – of who may not climb to the top. Poverty is about being surrounded by glass *walls*. This is a different kind of transparency. The poems collected here show us what it is to live in sight of, but utterly out of reach of things. This is old-school virtual reality.

Visit Duluth-based Holy Cow! Press for more information, or to order at [www.holycowpress.org](http://www.holycowpress.org). Visit The Poverty Initiative at <http://kairoscenter.org/invoking-the-spirit-of-struggle-dignity-out-of-the-depths/> or [poverty-initiative.org](http://poverty-initiative.org). “Broke” is reprinted from *Out of the Depths: Poetry of Poverty, Courage and Resilience* with the permission of Holy Cow! Press.

### *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*

Civil rights leader Medgar Evers was murdered in 1963. It took 31 years for his assassin to be convicted. Nearly 50 years later, his widow, Myrlie Evers delivered the invocation at President Barack Obama’s second inauguration. Frank X. Walker, the 2013-14 poet laureate of Kentucky, has written persona poems in the voices of Myrlie Evers, of the killer, Byron De La Beckwith, his brother Charles, and Beckwith’s wife and ex-wife. These poems split the stitches of a huge wound. By venturing into these identities Walker takes us back in a way that takes us forward, into the hard recognition of what we have allowed to be done in this country and a reluctance to call it domestic terrorism. He leads us where we are long overdue in a way that only a poet can.

With points-of-view from each of these voices, each intimately connected to the murder, the aftermath of the trials, and the backdrop of Mississippi, the structure of this book reminds me of figure drawing class. A model is positioned in the center of a room, surrounded by a tangle of easels and horses and oversized clipboards. The light source matters, the position of artists in the room matters. Everyone is drawing a certain view of the elbow, of the hair falling behind the right ear, of shadows on the drop cloth. Reading this book is like walking with Walker around the room, seeing all of the drawings. Each one is powerful.

“Sorority Meeting” opens with Myrlie Evers speaking to Willie and Thelma de la Beckwith: “My faith urges me to love you. / My stomach begs me to not. / All I know is that day / made us sisters, somehow...” (45). If we live in the United States we are bound, somehow. This is a book that is difficult to quote from, or pull fragments from because it really settles in when read in its entirety. It is hard to choose.

Walker’s tone is matter-of-fact. Clear. It does not need to exaggerate. The writing in multiple voices is a step of empathy and unapologetic showing. Like Jim Wayne Miller’s pools this book will take you deeper than you expect.

*Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* is published by The University of Georgia Press in Athens. Visit [www.ugppress.org](http://www.ugppress.org). Frank X. Walker is Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky and editor of *Pluck! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*.

### *Telling the Bees*

*Telling the Bees* is not, overtly, a book of spiritual poetry. Faith Shearin is not someone you would immediately categorize as a writer of spiritual poetry. But if you preach and write, I recommend that you read her.

Shearin is a stalwart of Garrison Keillor's Writers' Almanac on Minnesota Public Radio. It is the way she writes about everyday things that makes me want to bring her poems to your attention. How do we see the world? How we see ourselves in the world? How do we capture significance in routine details? Shearin does this especially well.

She has written quite a few dog poems. They are wonderfully disarming, but speak the truth of other things. "Strangers" is an example:

#### Strangers

The dog barks at us sometimes, if she cannot see us properly. She points her thin head and makes her most vicious sounds and, for a moment, we are strangers: thieves, thugs, muggers. We are not ourselves until her nose finds us beneath our coats and perfume; we are not ourselves until she licks away our disguises. (58)

It is human nature and animal nature to defend ourselves when caught off-guard. That is when we make "our most vicious sounds." Are we not strangers, sometimes, even to the people we know best and longest? There's enough here to parse for a long time. This little poem gets at the root of our "isms" to what we perceive as strange, foreign, or other. Don't you love the way we *become* ourselves through the signals of smell and touch and taste?

A kind of transfiguration poem, the title poem "Telling the Bees" (about the secrets spoken to the hive and news turns to honey) opens "In Europe's towns, two hundred years ago, bees / were believed to be little emissaries to God." (33)

Shearin makes marvelous, meaning-packed poems from the ordinary stuff of tarantulas, wedding dresses, routines of island life, rewinding movies, a very steep driveway and the aging process. *Telling the Bees* could be read – among other places – on those late nights when the sermon is stubborn as a toddler and just! won't! be! written! Dip in and read several. This is a prescription. It will help. I can't say how, just that it will, if you let her writing rub off on you.

Visit Nacogdoches, TX-based Stephen F. Austin State University Press [www.sfasu.edu/sfapress](http://www.sfasu.edu/sfapress). "Strangers" is reprinted from *Telling the Bees* with permission of Stephen F. Austin State University Press.

### *Old and Lost Rivers*

J.T. Ledbetter is a fine storyteller. He's the real thing, and this book is like a well-built house. You never feel like you're touching a hollow core door. Everything is solid, the work of a craftsman. The subjects in *Old and Lost Rivers* often relate to farming in the Midwest. He picks up on how interdependent people and places are – not simply in the descriptive chores-and-nature-and-family-history-way, but by what happens inside ourselves in relationship to work and our environment. These poems are not provincial. They are interesting and wise. They give us a sense of a reliable narrator. There's no such thing, of course, but good writers make us *feel* like there is. *Old and Lost Rivers* is expansive even though it is specific, as in "in the last green light:" (Greenville Lake) "There was only the snap and pop / of heavy curtains billowing into the room / and geese sailing across the pond / trailing their pink legs (68).

Hearty and beautiful, the poems in this book are full of detail without feeling dense. He never overdoes it. Ledbetter knows exactly what to tell and what to leave out. I'd especially like to lift up "Wild Grapes," "The Merits of Cows," "How Grief Works," "Firing the Gardener" and "Sunday Music."

Here is the opening stanza of the first poem. The title is taken from a composition of the same name by the American Composer Tobias Picker.

#### Old and Lost Rivers

Old and Lost Rivers flow quietly over older rocks  
and tangled roots,  
past empty houses leaning against each other  
where an old man standing where the two rivers come together  
watches a barrel and a Methodist Hymn Book swimming for  
their lives down to the Houston Marshes to the sea ... (1)

Don't you just want to keep reading? *Old Lost Rivers* won the 2011 Idaho Prize for Poetry. It is published by Lost Horse Press in Sandpoint, Idaho. Visit [www.losthorsepress.org](http://www.losthorsepress.org). J.T. Ledbetter is Professor Emeritus at California Lutheran University.

## In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

*David Axelrod*

Centuries have not redeemed us  
 from commerce, disputes enough  
 to fill archives – receipts, claims  
 and counterclaims – the only evidence  
 we existed. So we kneel, full of rural  
 longing, god somehow accumulating  
 in touched stone, in kissed icons,  
 tossed coins, wishes, sympathetic  
 magic. God who cannot be driven out  
 by chanting men or militant songs,  
 but goes on, abiding here in the dark  
 like names we gave empty houses  
 once inhabited by our displaced  
 neighbors. People who could not  
 endure local sorrows, dullness of lives  
 lived in provinces never visited,  
 far from trade or pilgrimage routes.  
 Nothing there but fields, puddled  
 roads, fouled wells and moldy bread,  
 sick livestock. Our whole lifetimes  
 misspent, bowing to the violent  
 insurgencies mustered by a priest,  
 the manor or oligarch, those living  
 in splendors unattainable as long  
 nights we dreamed of when young,  
 asleep in the arms of local beauty –  
 a cobbler's daughter with flaxen hair,  
 the baker's handsome son, a young  
 widow, the tinker, the winter traveler.

## Thou Preparest a Table Before Me

During the truce, I knock at his door  
 and my neighbor, my enemy,  
 seems neither shocked nor relieved,  
 but does as duty demands, pulls me inside,  
 kisses my cheeks, leads me through dark rooms,  
 and out across a threshing floor  
 where finches scavenge barley for weevils.

My neighbor, my enemy  
 serves me at his table, his sons  
 addressing me as uncle, his women  
 bringing platters of lamb, roasted eggplant,  
 fried onions and feta, salted lemons,  
 a pillow of bread we tear open  
 to sop up tomato juice.

And raise glasses of plum wine,  
 toast this day of reprieves, fugitive mercies,  
 toast our parents who fled to Aleppo,  
 leaving behind this harvest –  
 orchards and fields burned to ash,  
 artillery batteries arrayed  
 to punch our city again at dawn.

At the door at dusk we pledge  
 to meet in summer in a pasture  
 or on a beach, a future that disavows  
 no one, the living or dead, and there  
 we will toss grandchildren into the air,  
 and catch them in our arms, as we once  
 were caught by our young parents

full of laughter, past and future restored.

## Where Does the Joy Come From?

It's demoralizing to fast in our bitterness  
 dusk to dusk on the seventeenth of Tammuz  
 as Babylon breaches the city walls,  
 razes the temple, ruins our daughters.  
 Zealots avenge us, burning alive a child.  
 Our enemies retaliate, sons go missing,  
 and soon we discover their bodies buried  
 in the hills under piles of broken limestones,  
 holes drilled through shining foreheads.

But there are other days in summer,  
 when fresh strawberries arrives at our table  
 and taste so good we cry with gratitude  
 for all the flavors soil entrusts to what is  
 tender. The rain returns empty of guile,  
 then the sun, and soon, the milk of lactating mares  
 fermented and distilled spirits of horses.  
 At night, together, our faces glowing softly  
 in the shade of cypresses in the wilderness.

*David Axelrod's newest collections of poetry are Folly and What Next, Old Knife? both from Lost Horse Press. Individual poems and essays have appeared most recently in High Desert Journal, Fogged Clarity, Miramar, Serving House Journal, Stringtown, Talking River, Terrain and elsewhere. Axelrod is Co-Director of the Eastern Oregon University low-residency M.F.A. program in creative writing. Visit [www.eou.edu/mfa](http://www.eou.edu/mfa).*

## Names

*Jim Wayne Miller*

Preachers and professors came into the mountains,  
 brought Bibles, volumes of calf-bound classics,

Stately Latin and Greek hexameters,  
 memories stacked to the rafters with chapter and verse.

Often they were the namers. Creaking west  
 through mountain gaps and passes, they scattered old-world

names over the new – the kings and prophets,  
 gods and goddesses of Greece, Rome, and the Holy Land.

Names set like marble monuments in wilderness  
 made muddy roads and newgrounds numinous.

History, like a river out of banks,  
 set temples alongside shake-roofed barns.

So Mars Hill, where a Roman war god  
 had his temple, appeared a Baptist town

in North Carolina. The heathen goddess, Juno,  
 lives locally over a county line in Buncombe.

Though no blind Greek poet, Homer Hawkins,  
 who farmed for shares, had a thousand stories.

The Brier's grandfather, Hezekiah, fell tipsy  
 at baptizing, into the pool, but clambered

out, unregenerate still, though like his namesake,  
 the Judean king, he detested idolatry.

Nobody was named Jesus in the mountains,  
 but Marys and Marthas, Matthews, Marks, Lukes

and Johns filled church and schoolroom benches.  
Plato taught the Brick Church Sunday School

while Jupiter and Socrates lived as slaves,  
their graves unmarked in Brick Church Cemetery.

Hebrew kings ruled sixty-acre farms.  
Isaiahs in overalls prophesied dry weather.

Vergil ran the mill and cleared newground.  
Horace rived shakes and bottomed rocking chairs.

Other names grew up, rooted in local life  
and wry reflection on it: Sandy Mush,

Hogeye, Rabbitam, Bearwallow, grittily  
concrete, though close to abstract Luck and Trust.

Then came those names, concessions to overwhelming  
obviousness of numbers: Meadowstown, Surret Cove.

And those taken from the Cherokee:  
Cullowhee, Ocanaluftee, Nantahala.

But if the lofty and the grand were humbled  
in the homemade frames and faces of sang diggers,

farmers and squirrel hunters, the homely and the low  
discovered their own dignity and beauty

on Sugar Creek, at Snow Hill Gap, in Piney Grove.

*Jim Wayne Miller (1936–1996) was a pioneer in the field of Appalachian studies, a prolific writer (poetry, essays, fiction), scholar and teacher. "Names" is reprinted from his book The Brier Poems by permission of Gnomon Press. Miller was a graduate of Berea College with a Ph.D. in German and American Literature from Vanderbilt University. He was a professor of German language and literature at Western Kentucky University for 33 years. His honors include the Thomas Wolfe Literary Award and the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Memorial Award. Books by Miller include Copperhead Cane, Dialogue With A Dead Man, The Mountains Have Come Closer, Vein Of Words, Nostalgia for 70, Brier: His Book, and Newfound. Visit [www.gnomonpress.com](http://www.gnomonpress.com), [www.kentuckypress.com](http://www.kentuckypress.com) or [www.jimwaynemiller.net](http://www.jimwaynemiller.net).*

## The Coming Dark

*Mark Burrows*

This morning a line  
of geese drifts slowly out across  
the silky mannered sky,

all blue and vast and  
beckoning, their November flight  
a sign of the coming cold.

In their wide arc  
they hesitate for a moment and then  
turn slowly north again

as if remembering  
something they'd left behind,  
the lure of distances.

My eyes wander with  
them to the far places I've also known,  
strange and rich and kind –

a stillness beyond  
the burden of the day's work, a song  
that carries through

the coming dark,  
a hope despite the all of it that  
still keeps the heart.

*Mark Burrows is professor of religion and literature at the University of Applied Sciences in Bochum, Germany. His poems and translations have recently appeared in Poetry, 91st Meridian, The Anglican Theological Review, Southern Quarterly, Eremos, Weavings, Metamorphoses, and Almost Island, among others. His recent publications include two volumes of German poetry in translation: Rainer Maria Rilke's Prayers of a Young Poet and the German-Iranian poet SAID's 99 Psalms, both published by Paraclete Press. A forthcoming volume of his recent poems, The Chance of Home, will be published in 2016. Visit [www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com).*

## Inclining

*Maryanne Hannan*

*I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway*

Psalm 119: 112

How good does it feel  
to put one foot in front  
of the other?

Depends  
on so many things:  
the leg attached to the foot,  
the gear, the foot itself;  
the ground under the foot,  
the slope, the terrain;

even the weather that day.  
So many stats  
that never touch  
the decision to walk.

*Maryanne Hannan has recent or forthcoming work from her Psalm series in journals including Anglican Theological Review, Christianity and Literature, Cresset, The Christian Century, ARTS, Spiritus, and Windhover. A former Latin teacher, she lives in upstate New York. Her website is [www.mhannan.com](http://www.mhannan.com). Psalm 119: 112 in the epigraph is from the King James version.*

## Tystnaden

*Eric Stenman*

Existerar tystnaden faktiskt?

Alltid stöter

Och brummar

Och knackar det sig

I världen omkring oss

Och inom oss

Isynnerhet kärleken

Eller längtan efter kärleken

## Silence (from the Swedish)

Is there truly silence?

Always there's pushing

And whirling

And knocking

In the world around us

And in us

Especially love

Or longing for love

*Eric Stenman is a 1974 graduate of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. He is a Board Certified Chaplain and serves at Hanover Hospital in Hanover, Pennsylvania. His love for poetry started in high school when his 10th grade English Literature teacher introduced him to Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Idylls of the King." He has been reading and writing poetry ever since. It was at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota that Stenman discovered Swedish poetry, especially the 20th century authors. At Gettysburg Seminary he met his friend and mentor Professor Bengt Hoffman and was greatly influenced by Hoffman's poetry in Swedish.*



## A Search for Things That Have Nothing to do with Grief

*Pamela Wynn*

Russian dolls open at the middle, reveal another and another, to the miniature of the deepest self.  
 Stories line up on our mental shelves; who creates these plot lines brimming with grief?

A breeze shifts the sheaf of seminary student papers that scatter across the desk like quail.  
 God speaks in tongues in a lexicon of turmoil and clamor spelled out with grief.

The grandfather clock strikes deep and familiar; keeps time for the muffled internal silence.  
 Time haunts as each of us speaks the lines given, plays the assigned part laden with grief.

The high back chair in my grandfather's house smells of coffee and prayer.  
 The dead take their time letting go, relieved of the task of wrestling with grief.

Frogs croak in the marsh, deep in conversation with the soft breeze rustling in the pines.  
 In the man-made pond we fish for virtue in water the color of jade flowing with grief.

The Mandarin duck sails along the bank in his crest of rust, yellow sides, blue green wing patch.  
 He waits for the storm to come. Gales will blow and threaten to sink us with grief.

The giant, deeply rooted Cyprus holds its ground does not bend in these strange winds.  
 Bony shoulders like the whirled wings of an angel, Pamela, bear up in times laden with grief.

### *For Charles*

A sparrow fell from the sky.  
 No band of angels caught him: nor did I.  
 My son's neck snapped.  
 Doctors said, "He may not make it."  
 Blessed by the doctors, for they are fallible  
 Doctors said "He may be paralyzed."  
 Blessed be this temple to modern life.  
 Ancient Greeks took patients to sleep in the temple of Asclepios to be cured.  
 Did the daughters of Asclepios – Hygeia and Panacea – visit my son as he slept?  
 Did they seek to cure him with their two holy snakes?  
 Tubes and machines kept the humors in his body in balance.  
 Electrodes translated thoughts into spikes and valleys – interpreters unable to translate.  
 Did whole dramas play out in this coma as on a stage?  
 Were images projected on a blank screen painted by someone like Bosch?  
 Locked in his brain all along, did he see God on a blazing throne?  
 In three days my son arose.  
 A titanium halo anchored him to earth – a bird cage to imprison the head, neck and shoulders.  
 A torque wrench fastened screws to the scalp – one above each eyebrow, one behind each ear.  
 Months passed in a blur.  
 Comfort offered seldom comforted.  
 Some speak of God and his plan as is we are his special pets.

Kierkegaard said, "If you think you understand, it isn't God."  
 I've seen nothing to contradict this.  
 Precious sparrows – they fall from the sky in every nameable nation for no reasonable reason.  
 Sparrows without angels to break their fall.  
 Mothers and fathers cling to the hems of angels' garments screaming, "No, no, no!"  
 My son carries with him deep marks on his forehead.  
 They will lighten but never disappear.  
 Gleams of mystery fall upon me.

*Pamela Wynn is Director of The Writing Center at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and Writing Evaluator at Lexington Theological Seminary. Wynn holds a B.A. from Metropolitan State University and an M.A. in Theology and Art from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She is the author of Diamonds on the Back of a Snake: Poems and co-editor of Body of Evidence: Poems and "Ruth." Libretto for opera based on the Book of Ruth, with composer Barbara Rogers, commissioned by Northwestern College. She is a frequent contributor to Arts: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies and numerous other publications.*

## In His Dementia, Death Is Nothing Now

*Thomas Alan Holmes*

In his dementia, death is nothing now.  
 Three times these past two days, he's named  
 a gone one, asked if gone, but never how

each may have passed. His mind will not allow  
 his grief to reoccur; that part is tamed.  
 In his dementia, death is nothing now.

On Ambien, I've heard him weep, then vow  
 to stop whatever action might have shamed  
 a gone one, asked if gone, but never how

he might make recompense. Why disavow  
 forgotten wrongs for which he might be blamed?  
 In his dementia, death is nothing now.

He's looked for ended time, when heads will bow  
 and knees will bend for Christ returned, proclaimed.  
 A gone one, asked if gone, but never how,

he'll see in a new body. His white brow  
 will glow, with promised knowledge newly framed.  
 In his dementia, death is nothing now,  
 a gone one, asked if gone, but never how.

## Translation

The nesting ants below the bees have bored  
 into the rot, and bark has fallen; gray  
 and riddled phloem lies exposed. Midway  
 between this scar and few green leaves, the hoard  
 of honey, hid where heartwood held, is stored;  
 the trunk has swelled, the sapwood burst. Someday,  
 I wonder, honey, sealed in cells that may  
 expand and break, will run. The sweet, ignored  
 until the hive's capacity has failed  
 in productivity, exceeding all  
 constraints of physicality, congealed  
 then breaking free from bee-made waxen wall  
 then cambium and outer bark, revealed  
 at last, will force its fragile fortress' fall.

*Thomas Alan Holmes, a member of the East Tennessee State University English faculty, lives and writes in Johnson City. Some of his work has appeared in Louisiana Literature, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Appalachian Heritage, The Connecticut Review, The Appalachian Journal, North American Review, The Florida Review, Blue Mesa Review, Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel, Still: The Journal, The Southern Poetry Anthology Volume VI: Tennessee, Iodine and Cherry Tree.*

## It is Called a Tracery

*Lynette Reini-Grandell*

1.  
 Twining the top of a window,  
 branching beyond and above,  
 carved in stone, in wood,  
 splaying like shadows of tree limbs in winter,

it casts a pattern,  
 a shadow, on promises, plans, spirit blessings,  
 work that still threads my thoughts  
 into a thicket, benedictions and creeds,

chant and enchantment sung in slow notes under pillars like trees,  
 weaving regrets and forsaking, querulous barbs,  
 the dimness of days that darken my thoughts, noise of hymns sung  
 with eyes full of tears so heavy the pages were blurred,

and the infinite number of thoughts twiggling forward.  
 It shades a sung word daring imperious to breathe,  
 the sung word, the stem of an oak,  
 each multiplied branch making it taller and stronger,

drawing me closer, before the escape flows past me,  
 a woman, who glimpsed lakes over treetops,  
 who dreamed a dark horse could waft her away.  
 I fling myself at the roots of this tree, my face in the soil,

consumed by words and the study of signs,  
 scouring for one common atom uniting it all,  
 loving the unseen, invisible world,  
 holding fast to the blossoming tree limbs.

2.

In the cathedral,  
when sun shifts north melting the ice and the snow,  
in the chancel with carved wooden choir stalls,  
the choir sounds warm, *a capella*.

Soprano and tenor float above alto and bass,  
each part beginning, then picked up by another,  
a marvelous fabric of sound mixed with words,  
yet no words for the sound they create.

I in my bench imagine my song with them,  
throat opening full, lungs filling with air, expelling again and again;  
the air comes in from the space, nourishing,  
then a part escapes to join other breaths, the invisible body.

*Creating God, your fingers trace ...*  
*Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee ...*  
*I bind unto myself today ...*

3.

Then swift, the magic breaks,  
the promise of blended voices building together proves false,  
harmony an illusion when shouting shows strength,  
all my words taken away.

*Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me,*  
*Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me ...*

There is no comfort here  
as we perch on our velvet benches, listening, straining,  
the melodies circling in unstable harmonies,  
the suspended fourth tone that defies resolution.

The note leads me out,  
into the vibrant wood grain of the bench,  
the image of lapping waves and eddies  
each moment the tree grew still taller.

It draws me out like the dark horse that danced in my dreams,  
beside me always, leaping the ditches and road signs,  
its long, tangled mane that turned in its wake  
like leaves in a sudden, strong wind.

4.

*... by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three,*  
*Of whom all nature hath creation ...*

The sound washes wonder over me  
as light glints through windows,  
the metal and stonework pointed and curving,  
dividing the segments of light like the horse's dark legs

that carry the child where her heart must lead,  
to the boll of the oak, a bundle of dappling twigs and boughs,  
planting itself even as it rots inside,  
replenishing even as it is cut down.

You branches,  
your echoes and turns that I follow  
alone with my tiny bract off the main shoot,  
I long for your lift and your shelter.

5.

The leaves make a sound, a washing, a river of breath.  
They answer each other without hesitation  
as they turn in the wind and grow against gravity, murmuring,  
break, break, break, break,

like a plainchant the horse hears and stands still for,  
and the choir sings to the light,  
break, break, break, break,  
and I open my mouth to echo the sound

and see as I finger the grain of wood making its river,  
a thousand dark horses next to the stream,  
each dipping its long head to drink from the water,  
each one coming out from a thicket of sharp stems like thorns.

*Lynette Reini-Grandell is a writer based in Minneapolis whose first collection of poetry, Approaching the Gate, won the 2015 Northeastern Minnesota Book Award for poetry. Her work has appeared in Poetry City USA, It's Animal but Merciful, Before Passing, MNArtists.org, Poetry Motel, Revolver, Evergreen Chronicles, and elsewhere. Her poetry is part of a permanent art installation in room 5D of the Carlton Arms Hotel in Manhattan, and she has received grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Finlandia Foundation. In Minneapolis, she performs regularly with the Bosso Poetry Company, a subsidiary of Bosso Enterprises, theoretically based in Big Lever, Wyoming.*

## IKEA

*Kate Peper*

*Wake up sleeper, rise from the dead...*

Ephesians 5:14

No clocks. All the windowless walls  
gleam with their own light.

Rooms within rooms at first  
frightened then lulled her –

*Lord, I came here only for a faucet.  
How could I have lost You?*

She buys a miniature watering can and an indoor-  
outdoor rug before hearing the loudspeaker  
call her name. *I'm here, Lord, on the 3rd floor*

*with the cabinets.* The blandness of veneer  
is comforting. She wanders to the Malm Queen Size,  
stretches out face down, yields to its softness,  
dreaming of meatballs simmering at the Bistro.

Christ lifts up the sno-globe  
and shakes it, flakes falling on the blue  
and yellow building inside. *Wake up! Wake up!*  
He says to His flannelled doll on her bed.

## “Let Us Cross Over the River and Rest Under the Trees”

– Stonewall Jackson’s last words.

But first, I’ll stand on the shore  
and prepare:

I’ll twine-tie the pages  
of daily regrets I’ve been lugging,  
heave them into the current’s mercy.

I’ll unshoulder my bags loaded  
with worry’s fruit, each soft piece  
falling apart as they’re hurled.

I’ll unwrap the cord of guilt from my neck,  
fling its length into the river’s deepest heart,  
and look up to see the crowns of trees.

I’ll empty my pockets of fear.  
Flimsy as string tied end to end,  
it first floats, then unknots itself and sinks.

Unburdened, I’ll swim with strong strokes to the far shore.  
I’ll walk out lighter, full of light, unmade  
in His likeness and singing under the trees.

*Kate Peper is a freelance designer and award-winning watercolor painter living in Marin County, California. Her poems have been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and have appeared in, or are forthcoming in The Baltimore Review, Cimarron Review, Gargoyle, Poet Lore, Quiddity, Rattle, Tar River Review and elsewhere.*

## GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

### The Powers of a Flag

*John Spangler*

*What happens when a valued symbol becomes so tainted that it can no longer be used in public or another sacred space? See what one artist thinks.*

Earlier this summer, it was my privilege to assist in a wedding ceremony of close friends in a New England congregational church. In its traditionally spare, clean architectural lines, flags popped out noticeably to each side of the chancel area in the mostly white painted background. There were no fewer than four flags: the United States flag, flanked by the United Nations, the protestant Christian flag and the flag of the United Church of Christ. This collection is probably the largest I've seen in worship spaces, but reflected a conscientious decision to broaden and diversify the symbolism that comes with flags in general. They reminded me of an earlier era in which the flags were contentious symbols in the worship spaces, when Vietnam protests were in full flower and a generation chaffed at an often labelled "imperial presidency."

In those days, pastors occasionally saw their ministries crash and burn when taking controversial opposition to the war, or an unpopular president, or on the threats of growing nuclear arsenals. A very difficult conflict preceded me in the congregation I first served, also in New England, where a pastor resisted a parade of flags and Veterans carrying them in a very small worship space on a Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. This pastor made the right decision but paid dearly in relationships with local veterans who were deprived of their opportunity to have a special procession with the military colors. One could conclude that the flags were displayed in spaces where art belonged, but the critical issue would have been the relationship of the church to the state. The trend and proper thing to do was to eliminate all flags from sacred spaces, or perhaps to dilute their effect by adding more flags. But there was no question as to whether or not flags carried symbolic powers, and church leaders knew better than most.

The presence of the national flag was debated in many congregations back then, not usually around aesthetics or liturgical reform, but because of the idolatry of flags in uncomfortably close proximity to the furnishings of worship. Lutherans might have had even more focused debates than other protestant groups due to the history of the German *Nationalsozialismus* undue influence on the churches of Germany leading up to World War II. So prohibited is the primary Nazi symbol (swastika) in my lifetime, that the fact that it was taken from a version of the Christian cross is not widely understood. One congregation on the upper west side of Manhattan suffered patiently into the 1980's until it could afford to remodel and replace it's beautiful craftsman era floor tile that included the occasional use of the long condemned symbol in its entrance area. Outside of historical and art exhibitions, that symbol and its flags are universally and completely taboo in our time.

The U.S. flag spent a lot of time in the chancels of American congregations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but flags were making a comeback on another front. Ken Burns, creator of the PBS documentary on the Civil War, said recently in an interview with the Associate Press that

The Confederate flag came into [re]use after 1954. It went into state flags, Southern state flags and in other places, and the only thing that happened in 1954 that I recall was Brown vs Board of Education. What that means is that the use of the Confederate flag, on the back of pickup trucks, flying in the yard of the state capitol in Columbia, South Carolina, is resistance to Civil Rights (and) saying actually we don't believe what the Americans were founded on, that all men are created equal.<sup>1</sup>

The Confederate battle flag had been reintroduced much earlier, and was part of the original concept (ca. 1915) for Gutzon Borglum's bas-relief design to be carved as a Confederate Memorial on Stone Mountain, Georgia (see illustration). The original design included both the Confederate battle flag and nine Confederate leaders; only three were carved into the mountain, beginning in 1923.

But it was installation artist John Sims who created one of the strongest statements about this favorite symbolism of the Confederacy in a 2004 exhibit at Gettysburg College entitled "The Proper Way to Hang a Confederate Flag," part of a larger art show entitled *Recoloration Proclamation: The Gettysburg Redress*. The exhibit ridiculed the Confederate Battle flag by dressing it up, colorizing and accessorizing it and treating it as if it were a mere stylized garment or a decoration. The installation entitled "The Proper



Gutzon Borglum's original bas-relief design for the Confederate memorial on Stone Mountain, Georgia.

Way to Hang a Confederate Flag" gained most of the attention, however, consisting of an unaltered confederate flag held by a rope on a 13-foot gallops. Anxiety spread throughout the town and the college campus, public leaders worried aloud about security, and the Sons of the Confederate Veterans flew a banner from an airplane in protest as the exhibit opened. Some concluded that the exhibit was never seen the proper 'framework' due to a press release that employed the phrase "lynching" in connection to roped flag. But much of the media coverage used the same language to describe this particular installation. Critics labelled the work "contentious art."

For John Sims, it appears that in order to remove the sting of the Confederate flag's power, one can treat the symbols without the seriousness and respect that they might be granted in other contexts. The flag lost its dignity in the hands of the artist, and through its mocking and mimicking of a lynching, Sims undercut the symbolic power of the flag. What came to mind at the time was the mocking of the Nazi regime in Mel Brooks' movie and musical play, *The Producers*. Brooks savaged the Nazi leaders with satirical musical send ups, undercutting the power of the regime with a more powerful humor. Comedy Central comedian Larry Wilmore raised the obvious questions as the Governor of South Carolina called the state legislature back into special session to act to remove the flag from the state house grounds. "Take the flag down, and debate putting it back up," he said in exasperation. "It's decoration; we are not talking about an official flag. We are talking about a relic that has no purpose anymore. It's decorative. You





John Sims "The Proper Way to Hang a Confederate Flag," from the exhibit *Recoloration Proclamation: The Gettysburg Redress*.

don't need a declaration to remove a decoration."

A member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and a critic quoted by *The New York Times* said that Sims' work wasn't art, but a "gimmick."<sup>2</sup> At the time, the exhibit seemed to reflect the bitterness of the artist, who was also angered by the college's decision to move the exhibit inside and

shorten its length, and boycotted the opening in the end. The anger of local, regional and national interest groups appeared to be out of proportion to a flag which I thought at the time had been long drained of its power. Spending 20 years in ministry in New England had sheltered me from some of the resurgent, if latent, racial undertones still at work in our society. Eleven years later, the power of this desire to undercut the power of Confederate symbolism became clearer.

A decision by the Seminary leadership to prohibit unfurled Confederate Battle flags during an encampment on the campus this summer at the end of June created a storm of opposition in social media circles, calls to boycott the Seminary Ridge Museum, charges of censorship, and more. The reactions earned the Seminary a link on one of the larger white supremacist websites as well. Voices from both South and North, both men and women, vigorously defended the need to allow them on the campus, even though contemporary supremacist groups had met in town during the previous encampment in 2014, creating potential confusion surrounding the flag's



Detail of a street photograph in downtown Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

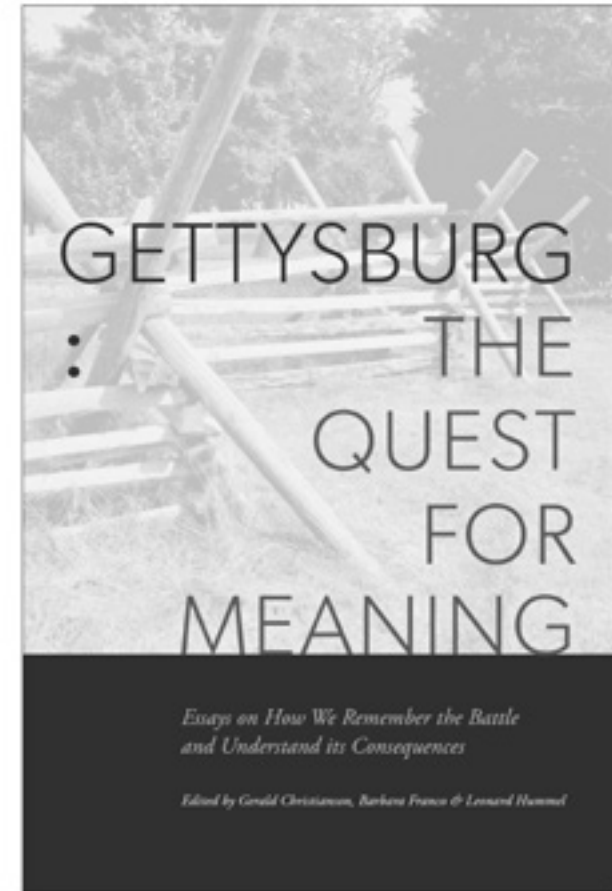
appearance. The mass shootings at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, SC didn't dent the wave of negative responses in the backlash. The fact that the flag remained in place within the historical exhibit of the Seminary Ridge Museum didn't satisfy the charges of historical apostasy. Social media postings showed cross burnings and U.S. flags carried by rallies of the KKK, asking why the Seminary allows the cross and the U.S. flag to be displayed at the Seminary. To be fair, hundreds of quieter "likes" continued to support the Seminary Ridge Museum and Seminary in the mist of this controversy. And a good number of living historians among the encamped groups understood, even if they did not agree with the Seminary's decision.

So while the flag hasn't quite lost all of its power, at least among a certain slice of American society, the context in which John Sims created his installation of artistic mistreatment for the flag and the "recoloration" and "redress" at Gettysburg has become much clearer to me. The Director of the Schmucker Art Gallery at the time, Molly Hutton, said she recruited Sims exhibit because she "thought it was very provocative, that it would get a good dialogue going about the presence of the Confederate flag at Gettysburg," she said.<sup>3</sup> It certainly started dialogue if not a shouting match, both locally and nationally. The flag controversy as experienced by the Seminary this summer revealed one more time how valuable it was to have John Sims provocative exhibition at our sister institution across town in 2004. It reminded me again how easy it is to tune out the appearance of this flag, to assume that its power has waned, and that there is a continued need to challenge the notion that there can be heritage without hatred.

### Notes

- 1 Ken Burns in an interview with Associate Press, appearing in *The Gettysburg Times*, September 8, 2015, marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PBS documentary "The Civil War."
- 2 Christine Jordan Sexton, "Southern Group Protests a Depiction of the Confederate Flag," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2007.
- 3 Deborah Fitts, "Gettysburg College to Host Confederate Flag, Lynching Exhibit," in *Civil War News*, September 2004.

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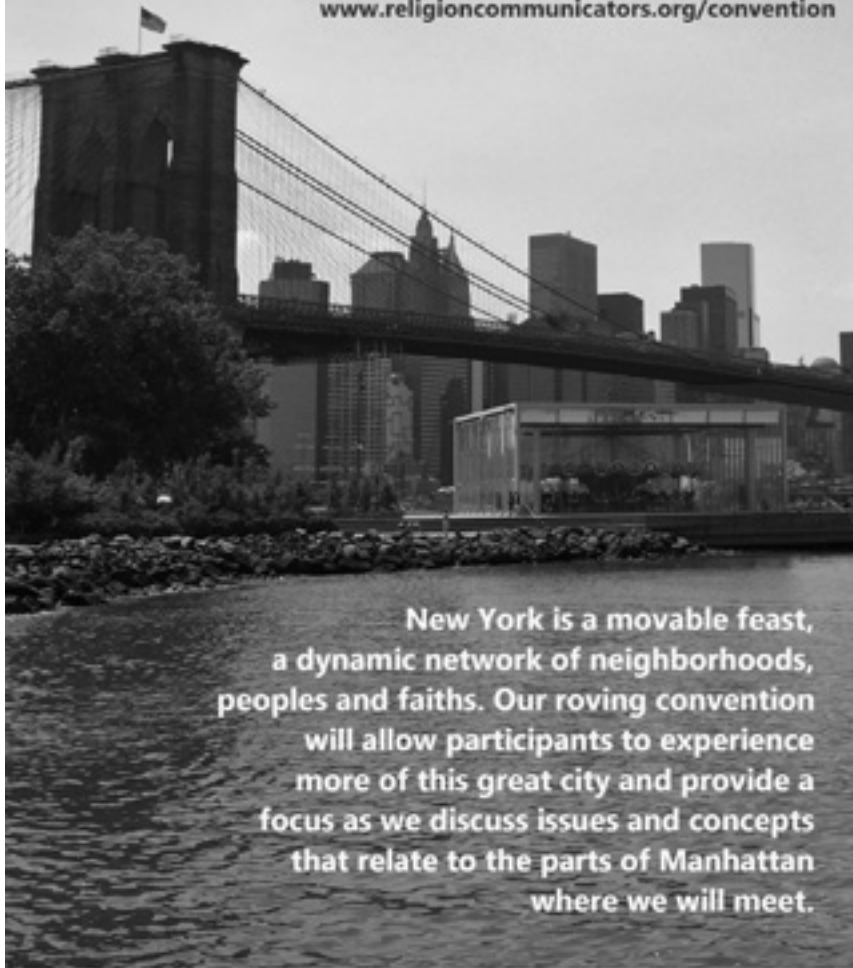
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