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Table of Contents

The Value of Children according to the Gospels
Charles A. Gieschen 195

Abortion, Incarnation, and the Place of Children in the Church: All One Cloth
David P. Scaer 213

Lutheran Support for the Pro-Life Movement: A Case of Faith without Works?
Peter J. Scaer 229

Marriage and So-Called Civil Unions in Light of Natural Law
Gifford A. Grobien 257

Man Reconstructed: Humanity beyond Biology
Brent Waters 271

The ELCA—*Quo Vadis?*
Mark D. Menacher 287

Suffering as a Mark of the Church in Martin Luther's Exegesis of 1 Peter
Kenneth J. Woo 307

Research Notes 327
Ephesians 5:21: "Submitting to One Another out of Reverence for Christ"

Theological Observer 335
LSB Service of Holy Matrimony: The Right Rite for Our Times
The Pro-Life Movement in the LCMS: Some Reminiscences
Can the Shoes of Richard John Neuhaus Be Filled?
Postmodern Attitudes among Lutherans about the Lord's Supper
Looking Ahead: Celebrating Martin Luther and the Reformation in 2017

Book Reviews 359

Books Received 379

Indices for Volume 77 (2013) 382

CTQ 77 (2013): 335–358

Theological Observer

LSB Service of Holy Matrimony: The Right Rite for Our Times

Lutheran Service Book has been available to our congregations for over seven years. With each passing year, calling it the "new" hymnal will become harder to do. Now, with something as massive and complex as a hymnal, which includes all of the attending volumes, such as the *Altar Book, Agenda,* and *Pastoral Care Companion,* it should not come as a surprise that it takes time for pastors to become familiar with its many resources. This is especially true in cases where services that existed in previous books have been altered. If a pastor has not had the opportunity to note the differences, he may simply revert to the version in previous books with which he is familiar.

A case in point is the service of Holy Matrimony in *LSB* (pew edition, 275–277; Agenda, 64–70). Over the past few years, I have attended weddings where this rite was not used, even though *LSB* was in the pew racks. Now, I fully understand that weddings are one of those facets of a pastor's calling where he develops a way of handling them early in his ministry and then pretty much sticks to that practice. If it works, why fix it?

To such pastors I would, however, offer the suggestion that they take a closer look at the rite in *LSB*. For example, the Agenda Committee made revisions to the opening address. In order to hold up the goodness of God's created order we find this line: "Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another." Yet, in the context of our hedonistic, no-fault divorce culture, they also wrote: "Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness."

Without question, the most significant change in the marriage rite is found in the consent that both the bride and groom give. The consent consists of a series of questions beginning with the words "will you," to which each person responds "I will." During my years in the parish, I invariably ran into questions or concerns about the consent, specifically, the word "obey" that was included in the question that was put to the bride. While the inclusion of this word dates at least as far back as the first edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), I am not aware of any source that explains the purpose for its inclusion. My best guess is that with that one word Cranmer was attempting to show the complementary relationship between husband and wife. Both persons, to be sure, make the same promise of faithfulness to "love, honor, and keep" the other in "sickness and in health." This promise of fidelity, however, is made within the unique roles that each will bear within the marriage.

The problem, of course, is that the word "obey" is hardly the best choice to tease out the distinctions within the male-female relationship that Paul so beautifully delineates in Ephesians 5. Now, it is true that "obey" is one of the meanings of the Greek υποτάσσω, the most significant word in Paul's discussion. But that translation hardly does justice to the relationship that Paul describes. (See the fine discussion concerning this particular topic in the Research Notes on 327–334 above).

For my purposes here, I wish to focus on one particular change in the *LSB* rite. Drawing upon language that appeared in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's 1993 hymnal, *Christian Worship*, the consent now reads:

> _Name of groom_, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? *Will you nourish and cherish her as Christ loved His body, the Church, giving Himself up for her?* Will you love, honor, and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to her alone, so long as you both shall live?
>
> _Name of bride_, will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? *Will you submit to him as the Church submits to Christ?* Will you love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to him alone, so long as you both shall live? (*LSB* 276; emphasis added).

Note the second question in each part of the consent. Rather than relying solely on one word ("obey") to allude to the relationship between husband and wife, specific language from Ephesians 5 is incorporated in question form. When a pastor sits down with a couple to help prepare them for marriage, he can walk them through the marriage rite, using this language in the consent to catechize them concerning the biblical understanding of marriage. And in the service itself he might consider highlighting these words in his sermon, instructing both family and friends in the truth of God's good gift of marriage.

But why the fuss? Aren't the old marriage rites sufficient, especially for pastors who have been using them for years? Sufficient, perhaps, but optimal, no. As we have seen again and again in just the past several years, the institution of marriage is under assault. Same-sex marriage is now legal in a number of states, and the Supreme Court has paved the way for more to follow. Our very understanding of what it means to be male and female seems to be disintegrating before our eyes. In the midst of this moral confusion, the church must stand firm and speak with a clear voice. The time for allowing couples to write their own marriage vows is long past; nothing less than a clear witness of the truth will do. And even the language enshrined in our previous agendas is perhaps not up to the challenge that the church faces today. So here is my plea for anyone who is not yet using the rite of Holy Matrimony from *LSB*: take a look and ask whether this just might be the right rite for our times.

Paul J. Grime

The Pro-Life Movement in the LCMS: Some Reminiscences

[The following was delivered January 24, 2013, as an after-dinner speech for the annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade. The Editors.]

The year was 1968. The Feminist Movement was gaining momentum while another movement was just beginning to form. Its goal was to liberalize abortion laws throughout the country. The year before, Colorado was the first state to take action by legalizing abortion within certain restricted situations. For the most part, people in the pew were unaware and uninformed about the brewing legal battle that was about to impact the entire American culture.

In 1970, New York became the second state to liberalize its law, enacting changes far more permissive than those of Colorado. By then, I had already joined an abortion rights group where, at meetings, we learned to argue *for* abortion using the verbal gymnastics necessary to erase the humanity of the unborn child. One evening a program sponsored by a local medical society featured a discussion panel consisting of three men and one woman. The men were all professionals and all prominent in their fields—a physician, a lawyer, and the city's medical examiner. All were clearly pro-choice and focused their arguments on a woman's choice, a woman's right, and a woman's privacy.

The fourth member of the panel, a woman, was introduced this way: "Our next speaker is Mary Winter, President of Women Concerned for the Unborn Child. Mrs. Winter is a housewife and mother of six children." What the audience was hearing was Mary . . . lots of kids . . . obviously Catholic . . . spouting the party line. I could sense the derision in the room. Mrs. Winter went to the lectern and, addressing her comments to the other panelists, said in a calm, soft voice: "But what about the baby? At 18 days the baby's heart begins to beat. By 21 days it is beating with a regularity that doesn't stop until death. The baby's brain waves can be detected at 43 days, and the baby can feel pain long before leaving the mother's womb." Talk about junk science, I thought.

The day after that meeting, I called Mary Winter, hoping to learn the source of her claims in order to better demolish them. We met a number of times during the next six months, and each time she challenged me to research history, sociology, embryology, fetology and other " -ologies" that informed the abortion argument. The Reader's Digest version of what happened after those six months is that I became a member of the Board of Directors of Women Concerned for the Unborn Child and soon found myself speaking on behalf of the unborn at Catholic venues around the country.

There was another member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on that same speaking circuit, a pastor from New York City named Richard John Neuhaus. One day I received a phone call from him asking if I would meet

with a few other Lutherans who were concerned about the issue. Dr. C. Jack Eichhorst, a theologian of the American Lutheran Church, had proposed the formation of a pan-Lutheran organization to give witness to the sanctity of life from the Lutheran perspective. Representatives of the three major Lutheran church bodies in the U.S. agreed to fly into Philadelphia on a scheduled day.[1] Unfortunately, a severe storm struck the East Coast, the airport shut down, and the formation of Lutherans For Life would have to wait a few more years.

In 1971, the LCMS passed Resolution 2-39, which made clear the position of our church. It stated that (1) from the moment of conception the unborn are persons in the sight of God; (2) the unborn stand under the protection of God's prohibition against murder; and (3) abortion is not a moral option except as a tragic unavoidable by-product when trying to prevent the death of another person (e.g., a tubal pregnancy).

Eighteen months later, on January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court announced its opinion on the abortion case titled *Roe v. Wade*. It was the pivotal action that, in effect, made abortion legal for any reason at any time in a pregnancy.

Coincidentally, on the next day, January 23, 1973, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) convened a one-day meeting to discuss two topics: (1) the role of women in the church and (2) the abortion issue. Six women had been invited to participate in the discussion,[2] and it was evident that there was not unanimity of opinion on either subject among the women or even among members of the CTCR. When I announced that the Court had ruled in favor of abortion-on-demand at any time for any reason in every state, many at the meeting were certain that information was incorrect, believing that the Court would never hand down such a sweeping ruling. Forty years later and 55 million legal abortions later, that is exactly what the Supreme Court imposed upon the entire country.

Soon after, the U. S. Senate announced hearings on a Human Life Amendment to the Constitution that would declare that life begins at conception. I received a call from the Synod's headquarters asking if I would testify as to the position of the Synod. The hearing was held in a large room filled with media from around the world. Cameras flashed as the first to testify, four Catholic Cardinals, sat before microphones. A day earlier, as I traveled to Washington, I was in awe of the privilege I had been given to testify . . . until I heard the Cardinals. All four were lawyers, and they were impressive, informative, and very articulate. I remember thinking, "Lord, You

[1] C. Jack Eichhorst, Jean Garton, Robert Jensen, Leigh Jordahl, Samuel Nafzger, Richard John Neuhaus, and Michael Rogness.

[2] Signe Carlson, Jean Garton, Janet Larson, Florence Montz, Marlys Taege, and Lucille Wassman.

promised to come again. Now would be a really good time!" However, when the next speaker arose to oppose the Life Begins at Conception Amendment, I quickly changed my mind and couldn't wait for my turn at the microphone.

That speaker's name was Bella Abzug, a member of Congress from my hometown of New York City. She had the nickname of "Battling Betty." Wearing her signature big hat and speaking with her famous deep, raspy voice, she said: "I speak for the women of America!" That did it! She didn't speak for this woman or for the women of the LCMS.

The significant part of that hearing is that while there were many individuals from various committees and groups who spoke that day, apart from the Roman Catholics, the LCMS was the only other church body in America to give testimony. In March 1976, the House of Representatives also held a hearing on a Human Life Amendment, and I was again asked to present the position of the LCMS. Once more the LCMS and the Catholic Church were the only church bodies to testify to their official position. I had an even stronger hand to play this time because a number of LCMS Districts had since adopted the Convention's 1971 resolution.

The testimony before the Senate and House was not as tricky as when the Synod accepted an invitation to testify in Pennsylvania. The bill before that state legislature would have required parental consent for any minor girl seeking an abortion. I agreed again to testify for the Synod and traveled to Harrisburg for the hearing. However, when my name was called to speak, the chairman said: "Mrs. Garton, there has been a challenge to having you testify because you are not a resident of Pennsylvania and, therefore, have no standing. I am sorry you have traveled so far for no reason." He was sorry, I thought. I was sorry I had spent so much time preparing the testimony. However, I took a deep breath, thought quickly, and said: "Mr. Chairman, you are correct. I do not live in Pennsylvania at this time. However, I do have property in the state where I intend to retire." He hesitated a moment, huddled with the committee, and then announced that I would be permitted to speak. And I did. It has been thirty-six years since that day, and I still have that property in Pennsylvania. It is a very small parcel of land—big enough, though, for retirement. It is six feet long and six feet deep where I do, indeed, intend to retire.[3]

In the years immediately following the Supreme Court's ruling, the Synod's Social Concerns Committee (SCC) of the CTCR sent notices to various entities of the church, informing them of a seminar the SCC was prepared to provide concerning the implications of the abortion opinion. A dozen re-

[3] The cemetery of St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Millvale, PA, which was the first congregation my husband served after graduating from the seminary.

sponses from colleges and districts were received, and during 1974 and 1976 programs were presented throughout the Synod.[4]

Frankly, there was not much interest at most of the events, and at one of our colleges we were even boycotted. The school president was so embarrassed he went knocking on dorm doors to recruit an audience, but to little avail. However, our spirits picked up when we received an invitation to present our program to a large seminary of one of the other Lutheran church bodies. We were so delighted that we scheduled a full day at the school and included some ALC and LCA pastors on the team.

The experience at that school was even worse because the students not only boycotted the information sessions, they also boycotted us at chapel and at lunch. Nevertheless, we stayed the entire day as scheduled, though we left as a dejected band of witnesses. As we walked down the empty hall to exit the building, coming toward us was a student, books in his arm and feeling his way with a cane. We greeted him as we passed by, causing him to stop. He said something about not recognizing our voices and asked if we were the people who were there to talk about the sanctity of life. When we said we were, he told us he had not been able to attend the sessions but that he wholeheartedly agreed with us. "Keep spreading the message," he said. As we left the building, one of the team members said, "Here was a whole school of bright, gifted students, but it was only the blind student who could really see."

Another response of the Synod occurred in 1977 when then LCMS President J. A. O. Preus hosted a dinner meeting in St. Louis to which he invited the department executives of the Synod. He had asked me to invite a few representatives of the national pro -life movement so the synodical executives could get a sense of the broad spectrum of activities being carried on in the country. Those included Judith Fink, an officer of Baptists for Life, which at that time was the oldest and largest of the denominational pro-life groups. She spoke of the value of such groups and the need to combat the rhetoric that abortion was "a Catholic issue." Joseph Lampe, Executive Director of Minnesotans Concerned for Life, discussed the role of political action committees, and Dr. C. Jack Eichhorst, an ALC theologian, spoke of the need for a Lutheran witness on abortion both in the church and the community.

At the end of the meeting, I asked those present if they saw the value of a Lutherans For Life and, if they did, would each LCMS member contribute $100 to provide seed money to help with the mailing and phone costs needed to put

[4] The seminar team consisted of two permanent members (Samuel Nafzger of the CTCR and Jean Garton of the SCC). Other members participated, depending on their availability and on the location of the program.

together a network of interested people. Only one executive declined, but with the funds collected from the others Lutherans For Life was born.[5]

In the early years, LFL assisted in the establishment of Lutherans For Life of Canada and Lutherans For Life of Australia. As President, I did a daily radio commentary, titled "Speaking of Life", which aired from 1992 to 1996 over satellite from the LCMS radio station in St. Louis. During the 35 years of its existence, LFL has had three LCMS members of the clergy serve as Executive Director[6] and three LCMS women have served as President and Chairman of the Board.[7]

So much for ancient history! This is now—40 years later and 55 million dead babies later. I do not believe the Father grieves over 55 million aborted babies. I believe he grieves over each individual and unique unborn, unheard, unseen, unwanted aborted baby—each one created by him, precious souls for whom Christ died.

It is our time now . . . because just being alive places a debt on us.

It is our time now . . . because too many church members are living in the aura of Christianity but not in its substance.

It is our time now . . . because we know we are not the children God planned. He planned perfect children and we are all handicapped by sin.

It is our time now . . . because we are not the children God wanted. He wanted obedient children and we are all rebellious by nature.

God could have aborted the whole human race but, instead, through the sacrificial death and resurrection of his only Son, he has made us his children by adoption.

Yes, it is *our* time now . . . *our* time to say: Here *I* stand . . . on the side of life.

Jean S. Garton
Founder and Past President of Lutherans For Life
Bryant, Arkansas

[5] On August 22, 1978, the founding meeting of Lutherans For Life was held on the campus of Concordia College, St. Paul. Dr. Eugene Linse, a political science professor at the school, hosted the gathering and was chosen Executive Director. Dr. Leigh Jordahl, an LCA professor was chosen secretary. Dr. C. Jack Eichhorst, ALC theologian, became Vice-President and Dr. Jean Garton became President.

[6] Dr. Eugene Linse (1976–1985), Rev. Edward Fehskens (1985–1995), Dr. James Lamb (1996 to present).

[7] Dr. Jean Garton (1978–1995), Linda Bartlet (1995–2004), Diane Schroeder (2004 to present).

Can the Shoes of Richard John Neuhaus Be Filled?

[These reflections concerning the legacy of Richard John Neuhaus were delivered at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on January 24, 2013. The Editors.]

My primary qualification for writing on this topic is that I am the nephew of my subject. As such, I feel a little bit like I assume Kareem Abdul Jabar Jr. must have felt when he came to play basketball at Valparaiso. He was a decent college prospect, but nobody was going to confuse him with his father. It is a daunting thing to live in the shadow of a famous relative, but it also is a blessing, not only to know a great man in a different way but also, in my case, because it gives me opportunities to write about him and about the possible future of our collective relationship with and voice toward the public square.

The question before us is whether the shoes of Richard John Neuhaus can be filled when it comes to issues of the church in the public square. The question itself assumes a couple of things that might require some explanation. When we ask if someone's shoes can be filled, we are assuming that it would be both difficult and desirable that it happen. As for difficulty, I think we all agree that Neuhaus embodied a rare blend of gifts that do not come along very often. More on that to follow. But what about the desirability of it? Why not ask, "Should the shoes of Richard John Neuhaus be filled, even if they could?" It is remarkable that we are here at an LCMS seminary wondering how to replace a man who died three church bodies removed from his tempestuous LCMS days. The disputes over his departure decades ago have mostly centered on whether he left in disgust or was kicked out in exasperation, but he was certainly encouraged by many not to let the door hit him on the way out. What has changed? Few people would have predicted back in the 1970s that an LCMS seminary theological symposium would be wondering how we can possibly replace this guy. I think in many ways it is we who have changed, and for the better. Neuhaus saw some things quite clearly, especially concerning civil rights and later abortion, that took the Synod some time to digest before coming around to agree with him. Which brings us to another question—if Neuhaus's shoes were filled, where would they stand? Would there be room for them in the LCMS, such that he could join with us in saying, "Here we stand"? Or perhaps in one of the new Lutheran bodies? Would those shoes inexorably wander home to Rome again? Might they would stand here with Luther and Lutheranism?

To answer these questions, we must ask first of all what was so special about the man that we feel his absence so keenly? For one, he was incredibly smart. But that really is not so rare as to make someone irreplaceable. If we are merely talking measurable intelligence quotient, I will bet there are a few people in and around any campus community who are pretty close to being just as smart, in a purely clinical sense, as Neuhaus was. Genius IQs are by definition rare, but not that rare. I have no idea what Neuhaus's IQ was or

what he would have scored on an SAT, but I suspect that what is true in Lake Wobegon is true for the real world—smart doesn't count for much. There is no shortage of smart people. For whatever it is worth, Neuhaus himself considered David Hart—author of *The Beauty of the Infinite,* which Neuhaus considered likely to become a major, lasting work, and monthly contributor for the back page of *First Things*—to be the smartest man he had ever met. And Neuhaus knew a lot of smart people. So if all we are after is brains, we have got an upgrade over Neuhaus in Hart. But, of course, that isn't all we are after.

Nor was it a matter of formal education. If you are a fourth-year student here today, you are only a few months away from being just as educated as Neuhaus ever was, at least in terms of formal education. In fact, you are probably ahead of him, because he never graduated from high school. He went to boarding high school at Concordia College Seward, but, like several of his older brothers, he had the knack for being invited to go elsewhere, and so, after taking a break from school as a teenager, he decided to re-enroll at Concordia in Texas where he had been staying with relatives. The high school enrollment line was right next to the college enrollment line, so he stepped over and enrolled in college. When the registrar pointed out that they did not have his high school transcripts yet, he simply said that he hoped they would be receiving them soon. When he caused controversy later in life by saying he hoped everyone was saved, well, you have to know what he meant by hope. He went on from college to seminary but never life went beyond the M.Div. degree, though the stairwell heading down into his dank basement was littered with honorary doctorates stuffed between the banister and the wall, one of which should probably be sent back to Concordia Austin in lieu of the hoped-for high school diploma.

I think that lack of a Ph.D. in combination with a host of honorary degrees speaks of the particular something, the first truly rare quality that Neuhaus had. For lack of a better term, I will call it intellectual entrepreneurship. It is a standard thing in academic circles to tout the "earned doctorate," with the not-so-veiled implication that honorary doctorates are not really earned. But it seems to me that such an attitude is almost precisely wrong. In some ways, an earned degree is far easier to get and represents less in terms of the special quality embodied by Neuhaus that we're considering than would an honorary doctorate. Most of us here today have probably gone to college. Do a little thought experiment—consider your whole class. If I consider my class in Christ College at Valparaiso or my first year of seminary here in Fort Wayne, I think it is fair to say that on average we were a fairly academically inclined group of students. Lots of As. Lots of high test scores. But if you gathered that group of capable students in a room and assigned one half of them to get a Ph.D. and the other half to get an honorary doctorate, I suspect the first half would eventually succeed at a much higher rate. Why? Because that process is mapped out for you. If you are relatively good academically and you have the time and the money (and perhaps a spouse with enough patience), there is a

pretty good chance you will succeed in getting a Ph.D. It would be hard, to be sure, and the catalogues and advisors cannot do the work for you, but they do exist. The long and difficult road to a Ph.D. is at least on a well-marked map. For those trying to get an honorary doctorate, there is no catalogue of course offerings, no schedule of how long it will take. You have to invent the process. That intellectual entrepreneurship, which includes the habits of thinking big, considering all possibilities, studying not for the credit but for the helpful knowledge—is the first thing (no pun intended) that Neuhaus had that was truly rare, much more rare than a high IQ or decades of higher education.

The second thing that was extraordinary about Neuhaus, and this may seem somewhat strange to say—but I think it is important to understanding him—is that he was deliberately single. This was not simply a case of the church ladies at his vicarage congregation failing to introduce him to their nieces; this was someone who apparently had the gift of celibacy and took seriously St. Paul's words about the blessings of having the opportunity for single-minded devotion, for whole-life commitment to ministry. His father was a pastor who was also married and had eight children. Richard, on the other, took a vow of celibacy while still in seminary. He set out to be single in order to be undistracted. I don't in any way mean to disparage the married-pastor model that dominates Lutheranism and by which I myself and almost all of my pastor friends live. In fact, I don't think I know any married LCMS pastors who are not, by my estimation at least, drastically better men and even better pastors for being married. We all tend to marry up. But our common model of ministry, as St. Paul so plainly stated, does tend to prevent one from living a St. Paul sort of life.

Nothing prevented Richard John Neuhaus from pursuing things wherever his intellectual entrepreneurship and passion for church and ministry took him. Being single allowed him to attend protests and go to jail; most respectable parish pastors with families can afford to spend a very limited amount of time in jail. It allowed him to set up the Community of Christ in the City, an apartment building where he lived and where the other residents could live a semi-communal life with daily devotions, something of a combination of a Christian family household and a monastery. And when, like so many institutions in his life, the Rockford Institute abruptly invited him to go elsewhere and threw him and his bewildered employees literally out on the street, Neuhaus was able to treat it as yet another adventure, deciding that the very first thing to be done in that case was to go to a nice Italian restaurant in order to make a plan. A man with a wife and children and Concordia plans to think about will tend not to find nearly as much adventure in such circumstances. It allowed him, like St. Paul, to know both plenty and want with contentment; his ups and downs weren't ruining anything for anybody else. However much or little you might know about the man and his life, you cannot even picture him married with children.

A very related third uncommon thing about him was that he was bi-vocational as a pastor. The combination of his talent and singleness gave him that freedom. He gave up his call to a wealthy, suburban New York congregation in order to take a call to an inner city parish on a bi-vocational basis that forced him to find his own salary, which he did as a hospital chaplain. A lot of guys would be open to that in theory, but the facts suggest few are open to it in practice, largely because of family and salary considerations, the need to pay off student loans and save for retirement, and other tame and domestic considerations. If the Director of Placement told the fourth-year class that there was a congregation interested in calling a candidate, with the caveat that the student would be responsible for his own salary, how many would be jazzed at that prospect? We don't like to admit it, but money is a huge factor in our lives as pastors. But it always comes at a cost, the cost of being considered an employee of the congregation in many people's eyes. Those who pay the piper like to call the tune, and they rarely call for their pastor to go off and do stuff that benefits the congregation in tangential ways at best. I don't know how much this attitude afflicts other Lutheran bodies, but it is a plague in the LCMS. Congregations more and more want to know how they personally benefit from everything the pastor does during the work week. And who can blame them for that since they are the ones paying the bills. A bi-vocational pastor is set free from that bad dynamic; he can do Word and Sacrament ministry as the pastor without incessantly trying to justify his salary. Neuhaus had many, many sources of funding, but he never let anyone else call the tune.

Of course, you have to be able to make money doing something else to be bi-vocational, and to do what Neuhaus did—the amazing amount of reading and writing especially—would have to be good enough to get paid mostly for doing that. When I was ordained, he wrote to me and said, "May your duty be your delight," and that was certainly true for him. By making his living reading and writing, he was getting paid to do what he was going to be doing anyway. What the harmonizing of duty and delight gives as an added gift is time. Without family obligations and without the need to earn a salary doing something else, Neuhaus had all the time in the world on which to focus on the things he wanted to focus. James Neuchterlein, who had been the editor of *First Things*, told me the quality that my uncle had was the power of concentration. Most writers and academics can concentrate and get in a zone for a little while, but it is exhausting. He said Richard John Neuhaus could routinely concentrate intensely on something all day. And he shares the story that when he first moved to New York to work on *First Things*, he asked Neuhaus on a Friday afternoon what his plans for the weekend were. Neuhaus replied, "Same as every weekend. I'm going to read and write."

A fourth thing Neuhaus had was a sort of naïve sense of possibilities. Perhaps because he had such an entrepreneurial mind, he had a sense of being able to do big things no matter the obstacles. Sometimes this had almost comical effects, such as when he purchased a piano on the theory that he

would be able to play it without too much trouble; after all, he was used to things coming easy and was genuinely surprised if they did not. But one could interpret it alternately as hubris or naivete that Neuhaus would begin projects like Clergy Concerned about Vietnam or Evangelicals and Catholics Together on the theory that such project could make a large-scale difference. Sometimes they fizzled, other times they had a lasting effect, as when his book coined the phrase "naked public square," which still has currency. But whether they succeeded or failed, they were based on large-scale thought. This can be dangerous. Recall the line from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*: "God hates visionary dreaming; it puffs up the dreamer with pride."[8] Certainly a man of prodigious talents and big ideas would constantly be tempted toward pride.

Which leads to the last peculiar thing I want to mention about Neuhaus, which is that he was passionate about the topic of holiness and was personally dedicated to the pursuit of it in a way that few Lutherans are. And though it is tough to pinpoint what exact difference this made, I suspect much of Neuhaus's lasting impact through the decades depended upon it. If all you had to go by was accounts of Richard as young man, I think you would probably conclude that he was a bit arrogant, pugnacious, and too clever by half—a first-year seminarian who acts like the professor and can back it up just often enough to get a reputation for brilliance. His father was fond of saying to him, "If you were half as smart as you think you are, you'd be twice as smart as you are." When he officiated at my parents' wedding, he did not even see them off from the parsonage when they left on their honeymoon because the family theological discussion with his dad and brothers was too intense to be interrupted by such trivialities.

That was back in the early 1960s. Yet, when I talked to people at his funeral who only knew him for the last decade or two of his life, they were unanimous in reporting that the things they remembered him most for were his generosity of spirit, gentleness, and humility. Had that spiritual progress never taken place, he might have become a cranky old man, endlessly recounting old battles and the zingers with which he had won arguments back in the day. To pursue holiness is to inhabit an ever larger world by becoming ever smaller in it and never to live in the past. I think this passionate pursuit played a big role in his greatness. It allowed him to do some visionary dreaming without being puffed up with pride.

But even taking all those qualities for granted, so what? Even if he was super-talented and dedicated and special and all that, what is the real nature of the void he left that causes us to ask whether he can replaced? What we are missing—the shoes that need to be filled—is someone for whom the public square has to account, a voice of vibrant, traditional, orthodox Christianity who thinks with the church yet thinks about everything else in a way that the

[8] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 17.

wider culture considers relevant. Public intellectuals who claim to be Christians, but who think with the culture and critique Christianity accordingly, are a dime a dozen. Sincerely Christian intellectuals who can articulate a solid orthodox take on any subject, but to whom nobody but their students and blog followers feel any urge to listen, are also a dime a dozen. What is missing is someone who thinks with the church and about everything else in such a way that popes and presidents, liberals and conservatives, Christians and others consider worth taking seriously, even if they disagree. This, I think, is why someone, for example, like Wendell Berry cannot replace Neuhaus for us. For one thing, he isn't "our guy," so to speak. But more importantly, you cannot absolutely rely on Berry, who is a Christian, to think first with the church. He might and he might not, but it isn't essential to his writings.

So assuming there is no shortage of smart, educated, orthodox, entrepreneurial, creative thinkers, how might one of them manage to find a national platform on which to stand and fill the shoes of Neuhaus? In other words, if we suddenly found ourselves with another Neuhaus in the LCMS or any of the Lutheran bodies, what would we do with him? Would he be synodical president? I once heard that Neuhaus had been nominated to be the first presiding bishop of the ELCA but that he did not get very many votes. Imagine how different Lutheranism might be today if he had gotten a majority. Or would he be a seminary professor? A parish pastor? I think this is part of the problem. How does one speak for "us" in broad terms without being a mere official spokesman of a denomination or institution?

For starters, it would require an ecumenical sensibility that is neither mushy nor sectarian. The sort of mushy, diversity-and-tolerance celebrating ecumenism that rules liberal Protestantism, at least as it affects Christianity and the public square in America, is indistinguishable from secularism. That is not to say they are the same voice—I am not accusing all liberal Protestants of being unbelievers—it is just that on every particular issue of controversy in which the voice of traditional, orthodox Christianity might have something to say, liberal Protestantism takes the other side. The voice of liberal Protestantism in the public square speaks in almost perfect unison with the voice of secularism. A horrendous example of that came to light just recently when the United Methodist Church published a document commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade by celebrating forty years of safe and legal abortion and dreaming of a kingdom of God in which every child will be a wanted child. As we think about both Neuhaus and the topic of abortion on this anniversary week, we feel his absence perhaps most keenly by not getting to see what he would write in response to the United Methodist document. A mushy, tolerant ecumenism fails to be any voice at all.

On the other hand, sectarianism does no better. Liberal Protestantism can stake a claim to be mainstream in a way that no single church body can, not because the mainline churches are so vibrant but because they agree with the

predominating culture. American institutions—universities, newspapers, museums, etc.—"get" liberal Protestantism. They understand each other. There is currency between them. By contrast, in our national consciousness even the Roman Catholic Church, which boasts a worldwide membership almost four times the size of the entire population of the United States and predates the United States by millennia, is quickly dismissed as sectarian or fringe whenever it disagrees with mainline liberalism. Look at how that church's perfectly rational and historically Christian view on artificial birth control is simply dismissed by our government as some fringe kookiness that need not be protected by law. And certainly no other traditional Christian or conservative church body could do any better that the Catholics.

Neuhaus, by way of contrast, was able to write in a non-sectarian way without embracing mushy, secular ecumenism. For example, I recently had a chance to work through his book *Freedom for Ministry* with a clergy study-group that includes people of many, mostly mainline denominations. A Methodist, a Mennonite, an Episcopalian and three liberal ELCA Lutherans all agreed it was one of the best books on pastoral ministry they had ever read and said they wished it had been part of their seminary curricula. Such a book, as with much of his writings, speaks broadly while also being bracingly orthodox. That is an almost impossible thing to pull off. Most attempts lapse into conservative sectarianism or liberal mushiness. Some writers, like Chesterton or Lewis, can pull it off to a certain degree, but not many; Neuhaus was in the company of the rare writers who could.

How was he able to do that? By being on good terms with a huge range of thinkers without agreeing with them on everything. As a liberal turned conservative, Lutheran turned Catholic, Neuhaus managed to make new friendships without always breaking old ones. But more importantly, he was able to focus on the *crux* of the matter apart from other loyalties. Ironically, it was sometimes precisely his sense of ordered loyalties that caused people to feel betrayed by him. His friends from the Civil Rights days thought he betrayed them by becoming a conservative, his LCMS friends thought he betrayed his heritage, his Lutheran friends felt he betrayed them when he became Catholic. None could really be mad at him because they understood that Lutheranism meant something to him, as did heritage, as did civil rights. All those loyalties, however, needed to be in order.

I think that is what the Catholic Church gave him that he could not find elsewhere: an order to his loyalties that reconciled his sense of loyalty with his intellectual entrepreneurship. Entreprenuership is dangerous and unsettling to orthodoxy and to loyalty. To confessional orthodoxy, intellectual entrepreneurship implies a defect in the existing scheme, something improvable or incomplete about our Confessions. It does the same to loyalty—always looking elsewhere implies something insufficient about here. But when his loyalty to his Lord, loyalty to the truth, and loyalty to the church merged in taking a leap

of faith that the church, uniquely, would be guided unerringly through time by the Holy Spirit, he was set free. Thinking with the church no longer felt like a limitation. This freedom comes through in his last work, the posthumously published *American Babylon*. The thesis is that every era and every place is a place of separation from the New Jerusalem, a Babylon in which God's people are captive, but with nothing to fear because the final victory is assured. So Babylon offers plenty for the intellectual entrepreneur to explore fearlessly as long as he thinks with the church, and plenty of places to get lost as soon as he stops thinking with the church.

The need for engagement in the public square will never go away. In every era there have been issues in the public square in desperate need of being informed by critical Christian insights. Today is no different. The collapse of marriage, the acceptance of abortion and euthanasia—these are public issues that will certainly destroy many lives and will certainly never be remedied apart from Christian voices in the public square. How might we in the LCMS cultivate new voices? Years ago, I managed to get into an ongoing clergy group called the Pastor-Theologian program run by the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton. I am pretty sure my getting accepted into that program was another perk of being Neuhaus's nephew; be that as it may, it was a great experience. I was the only conservative involved. The thing that stuck with me was a question I got from a moderator who was from the United Church of Christ. He asked, "What will it take to get the Missouri Synod to start producing theologians again, like Neuhaus, Marty, and Pelikan, who speak to and for more than just the LCMS?" I think it is a good question, especially when you consider that even when we were producing great public theologians, they often did not stay in the LCMS.

The first obstacle, obviously, is ecumenism. I think Neuhaus left us a good blueprint with the initiative Evangelicals and Catholics Together, which by rights ought simply to be a long-hand way of saying Lutheran. Sadly, I would say the liberal mainline does not factor into the ecumenical equation anymore, and I don't think Neuhaus saw much ecumenical future in that direction either. There could be no "Evangelicals and Catholics and Mainliners Together" initiative. I would say his pessimism on that score was justified; the ELCA way of being Lutheran and marching in step with liberal Protestantism is, as far as I can tell, a dead end, ecumenically. But even focusing on the fact that Lutherans are Evangelical and Catholic brought together like peanut butter and chocolate, we too often advertise that fact in the wrong ways. Instead of being confidently catholic among Evangelicals and confidently evangelical among Roman Catholics, we end up being obsequiously evangelical among Evangelicals as though desperate to prove to them that we, too, are saved, so they can let us into their club. And then we are obsequiously catholic among Catholics, desperate to prove that we are not Protestants. So instead of us bringing Evangelicals and Catholics together and being the bridge between them, we allow them to divide us into competing camps. We

have parishes that are virtually indistinguishable from Assemblies of God parishes in their architecture, music, videos, and even sermons. At least, no Evangelical would find anything very foreign about the goings-on at some LCMS parishes. And we have parishes where there is so much genuflecting and people crossing themselves and Gregorian chant and layers of garb that most Catholics I know would go there and think, "What are they, putting on a play?" If we are going to raise up a voice to the public square, we will need offer a solid Lutheran platform big enough for both feet, the Evangelical one and the Catholic one, to stand on, a comfortable and confident Lutheran identity as Evangelical and Catholic together.

Secondly, we will need to be more deliberate about raising up people who live it, not just think it. The old Concordia system did that for many people—your life was a mission defined by the church from a young age. Whether it was his civil rights work, his celibacy, his Community of Christ in the City, Neuhaus lived it. Too often, I think, we use the idea of vocation as a cloak to justify living lives that in all the concrete ways are just like everyone else's. We use outreach and the goal of being all things to all people to justify bringing in new members without transforming them or even holding forth that possibility. We often fail to teach about holiness in any concrete ways for fear people will take it as works righteousness.

If we somehow managed to provide a unified platform for someone to be a powerful voice to the public square, that man would need to be a holy man. His whole life would have to concur with his message. Of course, part of true holiness is seeing one's own shortcomings keenly, because that in itself is a message. Smart? Yes. Educated? Sure. Creative and insightful? Of course. Pastoral and wise? Yes. But perhaps, most importantly, someone who takes holiness seriously enough for the way he lives his life to be noticed. Whether we are talking about liberals or conservatives, Christians or others, the sort of great minds who actually make a difference are those like Ghandi, Bonhoeffer, Mother Theresa, Albert Schweitzer—and the list goes on and on—people whose lives put their own ideas to the test. This was one of Neuhaus's devastating criticisms of the notorious ethicist Peter Singer, advocate of infanticide and euthanasia; it was all just ideas to Singer. He wrote about the absurdity and even immorality of spending precious resources caring for the old and incurable, but then he spent lots of his own time and money caring for his mother in her last years. In his case and to his credit, his humane example disproved his demonic theories. But when Neuhaus pointed out the discrepancy at a debate, Singer grew angry. At the time, the crowd agreed with Singer. History will justify Neuhaus's critique. By refusing to live his message, Singer proved himself false. For us, if nothing else, I think this means taking the whole catechism seriously, not just the six chief parts, which are the ideas of our faith, but ordering the day with prayer, truly preparing for Holy Communion, and understanding our lives by the Table of Duties, which are

the actions of our faith. If we choose not to live it, we ought to stop talking about it.

A third thing that might not be a problem in every Lutheran church but certainly is in the LCMS, is the congregationalism that makes pastoral ministry a job, the congregation an employer, and the salary a fee for services approved by the congregation. Neuhaus was insistent that the congregation—Word and Sacrament ministry to those to whom one is called—is primary but not exclusive, and that there needs to be a place for clergy to be involved in things beyond the congregation or Synod. At this moment, our theologically trained folks are locked in a pattern of careerism.

Those three things—a unified voice with which to be ecumenical toward Evangelicals and Catholics, a sense that personal sanctification matters in voices from the church to the public square, and a focus on the parish that does not limit the pastoral ministry entirely to the parish—would help make it more likely that we could replace Neuhaus.

Neuhaus did not really die young, but nor did he live to a ripe old age, dying as he did in his early seventies. We feel the loss. But I suspect that, as usual, God knew what he was doing. What I mean is this: when God raises up great men, he often has them diagnose the coming problems in advance of the age. New secular plans for ordering society always come pre-debunked by Christian thinkers. Dostoevsky went ahead and debunked Nietzsche before Nietzsche wrote, which did not stop the world from following Neitzsche. Or consider the two twentieth-century men Neuhaus sought to emulate in many ways, G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. Chesterton was known for his cheerful, angelic, friendly ways of defending the faith. He warned and warned against bogus race theories, imperialism, what he termed "prussianism." Yet, God in his mercy did not allow Chesterton to live to see the Holocaust. Seeing his warnings ignored and thereby proved correct might have been too much for him to bear. Perhaps he would not have been able to keep his innocent cheerfulness in the face of Auschwitz and the end of officially Christian Europe. Similarly, C. S. Lewis wrote *The Abolition of Man* in early 1940s and completely debunked postmodern deconstructionism as nonsense, but he did so when someone like him could still be a leading voice of academia. He died at a comparatively young age in 1963—the same day that John F. Kennedy was assasinated—as though God in his mercy were saying to Lewis, "Okay, you've done your job. I am not going to make you watch this," as the sexual revolution swept through and Lewis's beloved academia was overrun with the very deconstructionists he had already demonstrated could never be more than agents of cultural destruction. Neuhaus spent his days warning of the dangers of a naked public square, trying to be the voice of the church at the table, like a man with one foot on the dock and one on the boat, and it seems to me God took him when he did as though to say, "Good job. I'm not going to make you watch this," as we drift rapidly apart, as we enter an era in which there cannot

be a Neuhaus, not because there are no capable people but because there is no longer a seat at the table or a listening ear. But that is all just speculation. I do not claim to know why God in his wisdom took Neuhaus when he did, leaving us, especially those in the pro-life movement, feeling his absence with seemingly no one to take his place. I simply think we should brace ourselves to be a part of an era that perhaps Neuhaus could not have borne the sight of. Perhaps the next Neuhaus will not be a public intellectual like the later Neuhaus at all, but a passionate man of action like the early Neuhaus, again called upon to know the inside of a jail. Again, just speculation.

But in the end, I think if we asked Neuhaus whether he could be replaced, he would answer, "no," with a sly smile as though to recognize how arrogant that would sound at first blush, at least until you caught his meaning. He would explain that he cannot be replaced, not because he was too great a man but because that is not how God works in history. It isn't "next man up" like replacing an injured player in football; rather, it is an unfolding divine drama in which each unique person fills a unique role. When he himself was devastated at the loss of someone he deemed irreplaceable, Pope John Paul II, he noticed in himself and in the people around him the temptation to look for the next John Paul II. To this he had to say: no, there will be no next John Paul II and we shouldn't be trying to find one; we should trust in what God has in store. He was a great page in God's story, but it is now a page that is turned. Now is the time to see what God will do next. The stories that made John Paul II what he was, the stories of Poland in World War II, the stories of Soviet domination and resistance, those things are gone; they cannot produce another story, another life like the one they produced in John Paul. The same is true of greater and lesser men, all of us, including Neuhaus. What made him who he was—the old "system" in which you went off to boarding school at fourteen and lived a life immersed in church and theology, the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement and the sexual revolution that finally sundered him from his allies in the Civil Rights movement—those are the things that produced a man who could be "our guy" so to speak, but who was also influential on a national and international level the way he was. None of those eras and events are coming back. People who try to force patterns onto history find themselves engaged in pathetic absurdities because they are stuck in a rut, like claiming the fight for gay marriage is this decade's Civil Rights movement, Iraq is the next Vietnam, this is the next that, which, in most cases, it is not.

I liken this idea to the book of Judges. The human condition remains the same, but God keeps coming up with different stories out of it. The refrain keeps coming back—the people were unfaithful, God punished them, they cried out, God had mercy and . . . did what? Send Samson after Samson? Gideon after Gideon? Deborah after Deborah? No. When Ehud, the patron saint of lefties like me, died, there were probably people looking for a sly and crafty man who could defeat their enemies with schemes and intrigue. And after a brief interlude they got Deborah, who sat around under a tree giving

wise counsel. Hardly the next Ehud. Then when they had to find the next Deborah they got Gideon, a total loser of a general who won battles through goofiness. And Samson was certainly not cut from the same cloth as Deborah or Gideon. The only thing they had in common was that God worked through them to build up his people.

I think Neuhaus would say that trying to replace the great man actually prevents you from appreciating the great man for what he was. It interferes with true thankfulness to God. It prevents you from being a theologian who sees God in history because you are too busy being a sociologist who sees nothing but human patterns. Waiting for Gideon, you miss out on Samson. The human side of history is predictable and boring, like the refrain in Judges. The divine side of history is every bit as reliable—we know God will do something great—but we can never see how in advance. It always looks hopeless, which is the necessary backdrop for the glory in God's story, which, because it is not predictable, is therefore exciting. There will never be another St. Paul, another Joan of Arc, the next Luther—we shouldn't be looking for them. Trusting that God will address the needs of the era in unexpected ways is part of thinking with the church. If we would replace Neuhaus, we ought first to learn to think with the church, and when we do so we see that looking for the next Neuhaus is not thinking with the church. It is to go by sight, trying to capture something safely known rather than expecting something unknown with the hope that cannot disappoint us.

So I offer no suggestions. I foresee no next Neuhaus. I think we are entering a new and ill-defined era in which voices like Neuhaus will very likely be impossible—there is too much fragmentation, too much crumbling at the foundations. The days of a public intellectual thinking with the church on the issues of the day and being taken seriously by the culture may be over, at least for now. I am thankful for what God did through one of his many servants and for securing the church through a tumultuous era, but it will take a different story, a different voice to handle the future. And it is partly from Neuhaus, that faithful servant of the previous era, that I have learned to trust that no matter how hopeless the backdrop, whatever comes next in this particular Babylon, there is nothing of which we should be afraid.

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Postmodern Attitudes among Lutherans about the Lord's Supper?

Recently I was teaching an adult Bible class about the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. At various points the discussion addressed differences between what Lutherans believe and what other Christian churches believe

regarding Christ's presence. Toward the end of the class, one parishioner protested what she thought to be unfair labeling of the differences of opinions. She acknowledged, on the one hand, that most Protestants had an incorrect understanding, which encouraged all kinds of false beliefs about spirituality and about how one really could become close to Jesus. And, on the other hand, she recognized abuses in Roman Catholicism that emphasize the adoration of the Sacrament and detract from the biblical institution to eat and to drink for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Nevertheless, she appealed to me and to the class that we not perpetuate and aggravate divisions in the church by saying that we Lutherans have the teaching right while the Reformed and the Roman Catholics do not. These other groups are sincere in their beliefs, and it is not helpful, she said, to set up an antagonism between Christian groups that suggests that we're right and they're wrong.

Traditionally her argument would be refuted by its logical inconsistency, which she herself acknowledges: other churches do in fact have a wrong understanding. Therefore it is not incorrect to point this out and to refute it with the true teaching.

Yet it is no longer sufficient to point out the logical inconsistencies, because the problem is not so much with logic as it is with epistemology. Postmodernism is essentially an epistemological shift from rationalistic modernism. Postmodernism is dismissed by some as an imaginary category and lacking clear definition, but only because these critics think from a modernist point of view. Postmodernism simultaneously camouflages itself from criticism (by not fitting the modernist category of reason and therefore going somewhat undetected) and covertly undermines reason (by relativizing it). Nevertheless, postmodernism is a definable epistemology that recognizes a person to receive identity not as an individual consciousness (as with Descartes), but as a construction of experiences, relationships, intuitions, and tradition, as well as a reasonable intellect. Postmodernism is not anti-rational per se, but it relativizes reason, factoring in the shaping of a person through unanalyzed experiences, relationships, intuitions, and traditions. Like-minded individuals form communities in which their identity is affirmed and reinforced, even while the community acknowledges that other people may find identity in different, competing communities with different experiences, relationships, and traditions.

Thus, this young woman was not speaking illogically, but under a different epistemological framework from the traditional dogmatic response: other Christians may be wrong in their understanding of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, but it is fruitless to declare this dogmatically, because, as postmodernists, they are shaped by more than a bare, rational reading of the text. They are also shaped by their experience in church services, what their tradition has verified for them, and how they feel about all of this. In postmodern terms, Christian communions have become distinct communities.

A contemporary, faithful response, then, needs to recognize postmodernism for what it is, without capitulating to relativism. It is important, first of all, to perceive that postmodernism does not abandon reason, but relativizes it. For the postmodernist, reason is not useless, but it is so colored by other factors shaping the person that one can never be certain of truth. (The significance of deconstruction plays in here.) The contemporary response is not to assert the primacy of reason over the other factors of human formation, but to integrate all of them. Reason, intuition, experience, and tradition work together. (One benefit of postmodernism is that it presents the opportunity to restore a fuller anthropology to a modern worldview that reduced the human person to bare reason).

Alisdair MacIntyre (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 1988) recognized that a community could come to judge its own beliefs to be inadequate or wrong through interaction with another community. The path to such conversion is arduous, for it requires the communities first to understand each other, and then for one to be willing to recognize its inferiority or error in some way. But, MacIntyre argues, this is possible when communities engage each other with clarity, with openness to understanding each other for the sake of translating social and cultural meaning, and by perceptively questioning and criticizing each other. This last step demands communities to work rigorously to justify their actions and beliefs. Seeking the truth, then, still requires us to make claims about the truth and even to make judgments about others. We ought to do so with courtesy and gentleness, for postmodernism claims to truth strike not only at reasons and arguments, but also at souls of people who has been formed by their communities, for better or for worse.

The church, also, may embrace that opportunity that the postmodern mind presents, that is, the increasing role of tradition. For some in the church, tradition has poor connotations, suggesting a dry repetition of rituals whose meaning has not been passed forward to today. This is not what I mean. When a postmodernist speaks of tradition, he has in mind foundational stories or narratives which give definition to his community. For the church, such a foundational narrative is the Scripture. Of course, the Scripture is more than a foundational narrative or a tradition. I call Scripture "narrative" or "tradition" only to correlate it to the postmodern epistemology. Scripture is not mere narrative or tradition in the dogmatic sense, that is, something crafted by human imagination or repetition.

The postmodern challenge, then, calls us to reinvigorate our study of the Scriptures, to proclaim the truths presented therein, and to articulate Jesus Christ and his redemptive work in the depth, breadth, and richness that the Scriptures themselves present. Proof texts continue to have their place, yet not as the final answer of a dogmatic dispute, but as the wide-open entrance into the profound revelation of God's salvation. Disputes with other Christians and non-Christians are insufficient when they only show error. They must further

positively teach Christ in all the Scriptures, so as to beckon the hearer into the reasonable story of Christianity. And, thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit does this beckoning and converting through such faithful proclamation.

There are differences between Lutherans and Protestants and Roman Catholics. It does no good to minimize these. Even from the postmodern perspective, clarity gives definition to each community, so they know where they stand. Yet unity in the church will never be achieved solely by argument, and simply declaring "the Lutheran Church has the truth" does little to soften the hard heart. "[I]t is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments" (AC VII 2). The unity of the church does not depend on teaching a particular denomination's doctrine. Neither the Roman Catholics, nor the Methodists, nor the Lutherans, as particular groups, are the one church. Rather, the one church is wherever there is agreement concerning the teaching of the gospel and the sacraments, wherever this may be found, whether among Lutherans, Methodists, and Roman Catholics. It is ours to be about the teaching of this gospel and administering the sacraments as the Scriptures in their fullness and truth proclaim them.

Gifford Grobien

Looking Ahead: Celebrating Martin Luther and the Reformation in 2017

In less than four years, Lutherans around the world will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Its beginning is identified with the date of October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses on the doors of the castle church in Wittenberg. The question for the worldwide Lutheran community is how this anniversary will be celebrated. Considering the locality where it all started, one might assume that not much will happen. Wittenberg is a small, quiet city of 50,000 citizens, with no more than two significant streets and an annual visit of merely 85,000 overnight tourists, which means that many hotel beds are left unoccupied throughout the year. Perhaps this is all because Lutherans have never made much ado about commemorating sites of their heroes; in contrast to others, they do not have a central place, no Rome or Mecca. In a way, Luther himself would have been proud of his followers in that it is not he whom one should revere, but Christ alone.

Yet all this will apparently change in view of 2017. In a 2012 article in the Sunday edition of the famous German newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, Ralph Bollmann and Inge Kloepfer announce that great business is planned with the Luther year in 2017 ("Martin Luther kommt groß ins Geschäft," July 29, 2012, pp. 30–31). Already in 2008, the Luther decade officially began with

the goal of making Wittenberg a center for worldwide Lutheranism. To serve that promotion, a wide range of events is taking place, including concerts, art exhibitions, and the publication of many books on Luther and the Reformation. In fact, Luther will not be boxed in: plans are underway to make the Luther year both a theological *and* cultural event, a church affair *and* one for tourists as well that will, in turn, benefit the economy of that region. Commercialization and church seem to have been at odds in Luther's mind, but the church is not the sole planner of this anniversary. The German parliament has officially set aside 35 million Euros in its budget. The state of Sachsen-Anhalt, where Wittenberg and Eisleben are located, will invest 75 million Euros in these cities, with such projects as converting the house in Eisleben where Luther died into a museum. And the churches have pledged 17 million Euros. The infrastructure, too, will be improved, and Wittenberg will receive a train station that is state of the art in terms of being built environmentally conscious. If current plans come to fruition, the castle and the castle church, where Luther nailed the theses, will receive a face-lift, and the city church, too, will be freshly renovated for the occasion. A notable name listed among the donors and Luther supporters is Friede Springer, wife of the late German newspaper tycoon, Axel Springer, and a member of the Independent Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK), a partner church of the LCMS.

The target group of all this future bustling activity is the worldwide Protestant community, located in countries like the United States, Scandinavia, and even China with its forty-plus million Protestants, where there is great interest in visiting Germany and especially the sites of the great Reformer. The minister of culture, Stephan Dorgerloh, is of the opinion that every Protestant should have visited Wittenberg at least once in his or her lifetime. Reiner Haselhof, the president of the state of Sachsen-Anhalt, though a Roman Catholic himself, recently made a promotional tour through parts of the United States to raise interest for Luther. After all, the United States has 160 million Protestants, more than any other country. The German Central Board of Tourism has also announced that from 2015 onward it will promote sites where Luther lived and worked as compelling reasons to visit Germany. These not only include Wittenberg where Luther spent most of his life, but also Eisleben, the place of Luther's birth and death; Mansfeld, where his parents moved and where he attended school; Eisenach, where Luther learned Latin for three years and later translated the New Testament in just eleven weeks during his stay in the Wartburg Castle; Erfurt, where he began his theological studies at the Augustinian cloister as an eighteen-year-old; and finally Worms, where Luther defended his Ninety-five Theses on April 17, 1521.

Beyond the political, cultural, and economic investment, the churches are also stakeholders in 2017. The official spokesperson elected for promoting the anniversary year is the former bishop of the Lutheran Church of Hannover and chairperson of the council of the alliance of all Protestant churches in

Germany, Margot Käßman. Her popularity and charisma will guarantee significant exposure in the German media. As she effectively assumes responsibility over Luther's theological legacy, certain accents in Luther' thought are being viewed as unbecoming. His supposed anti-Semitism, even his so-called "discovery of the Gospel," seem to stand in the way of forging ecumenical relations and overcoming present discords. Käßman hopes that the year 2017 will show itself as a gesture of reconciliation between Protestants and Roman Catholics and thus become something different than past anniversaries.

The LCMS cannot and will not be a silent observer in all of this, especially since it now has in its possession a historic school building in Wittenberg. Its renovation and refurbishing is yet to be completed. There is some urgency in this Wittenberg Project, which is owned by the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg, since no one wants this centrally-located gem to become a sore spot in the midst of all the upgrading that has begun and, if promises are kept, will continue all around the city. With its presence in the city, the LCMS and its German partner church, the SELK, can bring a message that is no longer heard with clarity both to the Wittenberg community and worldwide. Luther is not a folk hero for the Germans alone. This anniversary has to do with the gospel itself, which is connected to the person of Christ and which, according to Luther, calls out every person to repent daily in order to be forgiven. By making Luther and 2017 part of its missionary obligation to the world, the LCMS will undoubtedly set itself apart from the message of reconciliation from Käßman and the churches uniting behind her. The SELK, the partner church of the LCMS, will share that missionary charge but will thereby ruffle the feathers of many in the neighboring state churches.

The question for Lutherans worldwide is whether the 500th anniversary will be true to Luther and not just to the spirit of the twenty-first century—if this is genuinely meant to be an anniversary of Luther at all. It will have to be a celebration of the gospel that freely bestows God's grace because of Christ that is not forced into the straightjacket of human effort, metrics, and rapprochements based on ideology but speaks out clearly to every individual sinner in this world. As simple as that message is, it is losing its footing in Germany and all over the world. For many reasons, people are turning their back on the church in search of alternative soteriologies, all of which cater to natural religiosity that wants to have a part in establishing a relationship with God.

Klaus Detlev Schulz