

# Concordia Theological Quarterly



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### Errata

There is an error on page 285 in the article by Charles A. Gieschen, “The Relevance of the *Homologoumena* and *Antilegomena* Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case,” *CTQ* 79 (2015). The sentence in the first paragraph that reads, “It is ironic that the two primary proof-texts . . . are both from the *antilegomena*” should read: “It is ironic that one of the two primary proof-texts for the divine nature of the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Peter 1:21, is from the *antilegomena*.”

The Editors

## Theological Observer

### The Origin of Authentic Rationalism

Not fitting typical articles presented in the *CTQ* is one in this issue on the hermeneutical method of Johannes Salomo Semler, the leading Lutheran rationalist theologian in the eighteenth century. Students of Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* are familiar with Pieper's opposition to rationalism, which he called the mother of synergism. Among the sins of rationalism are its denial of biblical inspiration and the deity of Christ. Rationalism for Pieper stands for everything opposed to Christianity. That being said, many of us have only a passing acquaintance with how it originated and how it works. Contrast our experience with that of the founding fathers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, who lived and breathed rationalism in the Lutheran churches in which they were raised and in their theological education. They heard lectures at the theological faculties of German universities in the waning days of Rationalism and from their experience they were determined to establish a confessional church in the United States. When he was a young man, Wilhelm Sihler, the first president of Concordia Theological Seminary, saw himself as a rationalist, and he even admired Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, whose lectures he heard at the University of Berlin—all this before his whole-hearted acceptance of Christianity. If we dare speak of negative causes, the Missouri Synod as an explicitly confessional Lutheran church came into existence as a result of historical criticism.

Historical criticism is rooted in the philosophies of Baruch Spinoza, a Jew who denied Old Testament miracles, and of Gottfried Lessing, who held that past events remained inaccessible. These ideas found their way into Lutheran theology through Johann Salomo Semler, who is considered the father of historical criticism as a method in studying the Bible. Before the age of rationalism, Lutheran theologians took up the question of the historical character of biblically reported events. In 1658, before Spinoza came on the scene, Nicolaus Jung of Brandenburg, a student of the great Lutheran dogmatician Johann Andras Quenstedt, set forth the biblical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Bernhard Oldermann in 1683 presented the metaphysical possibility and the historical probability for Jesus' resurrection. Spinoza's arguments were specifically addressed by Paul Christoph Schilling in his 1709 dissertation at the University of Leipzig. Ideas spawned in the late seventeenth century prepared the intellectual

environment in which rationalism permeated eighteenth-century Lutheran theology and almost pushed it into extinction. Semler offered naturalist explanations for miracles, but he almost inexplicably held to Jesus' resurrection. His ideas evolved into the historical agnosticism of David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century. While Semler held that Jesus and the apostles accommodated their teachings to fit the superstitions of the first century, Rudolph Bultmann credited early Christians with transforming the simple teaching and deeds of Jesus into dogma and miracles. Bultmann's hermeneutical principle was at the heart of the walkout of majority of the faculty Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis in February 1974. Dr. Boris Paschke presents a fascinating historical essay on Semler whose ideas ignited current historical critical methods.

David P. Scaer

### ***Lutheran Service Book at Ten Years***

Almost nine years ago shortly after arriving here on campus, I was invited to offer my thoughts on the initial reception of the Synod's new hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, which at that time had been available for just over a year. Given that I had spent the previous decade shepherding that project to completion, it wasn't too surprising that my comments were generally positive (*CTQ* 71 [July/October 2007]: 368-71). And rightly so, I might add, since the overall response at that time was quite favorable. To my credit, I did concede that it was too early to offer a valid evaluation and that the historians would caution us to wait a decade or two. Well, by the end of this summer a decade will have elapsed since Concordia Publishing House started shipping the first copies of *LSB*. That we still hear it occasionally referred to as the "new" hymnal suggests either that old habits die hard or that deep down inside we are hoping there won't be another *new* hymnal for a long time.

So how has *LSB* fared after a decade of use? Though I'm still a biased observer, I think it's fair to say that it has fared quite well. My totally unscientific reading is that *LSB* hit the spot for the vast majority of congregations in the LCMS. CPH estimates that nearly 85% of congregations are using it. Of course, it's not a perfect book; indeed, we never had any illusions that it would be. And were we to begin the process today of developing a new hymnal, I'm confident that the final product would look a bit different.

Speaking of looking a bit different, much of *LSB* is available in a French translation (*Liturgies et Cantiques Luthériens*) that was published in

2009 by Lutheran Church–Canada. Additionally, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya published a new hymnal (*Ibada Takatifu*) in 2013 that was heavily inspired by *LSB*.

The vast supporting resources that were published early in the process have also been a great blessing. Editions new to us, like the guitar chord volumes for all of the hymns and services as well as the electronic version, *Lutheran Service Builder*, have been great boons. Perhaps an even more influential byproduct is the *Pastoral Care Companion*, which has not only been wildly successful in its original form but is available as a mobile app and has also been translated into Spanish. Seminary graduates of the past ten years whose entire ministries have been shaped by this resource would probably find it difficult to fathom how pastors cared for souls without it, much the same way the younger generation wonders how their parents ever communicated before the age of email (already passé) and instant messaging.

If there has been a disappointment, it's the delay in appearance of two essential supporting volumes: the companion (or handbook) on the hymns and the desk edition, which will provide commentary on all of the services in *LSB*. I can express disappointment without giving serious offense since, at least in regard to the latter resource, I am as much to blame as anyone. I could offer the excuse that the goal for both of these volumes is simply to produce the best resources on the market, but that is of little help if they aren't available for anyone to use. The good news here is that progress is being made on both fronts and that within a few years they should be available. And I think it's safe to say that they will be most useful.

And not a moment too soon. I say this because after ten years of use many of us are becoming quite familiar with significant portions of the hymnal. And that's a good thing. We've reached a point, however, where each of us has begun to "tune out" those things in the hymnal with which we are not as familiar. Though I was the director of the project and looked over every page umpteen times before the book went to press, I experience this phenomenon myself now and then! My suspicion is that this is a natural phenomenon that occurs with any hymnal. Just start paging, for example, through a section of the hymns, paying close attention to those things that don't look familiar. You'll be in for some surprises.

For a specific example, consider *LSB* 925–931 (and also 983–986 in the *Builder* and the hymn accompaniment edition). The texts for most of these Old Testament canticles appeared in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (pp. 120–122), though that hymnal provided no directions for how they might be used.

(*TLH* didn't even provide the biblical references for the texts, just the Latin titles.) The settings of these canticles in *LSB* provide antiphons for the congregation to sing along with chant tones for the text. There are various uses for these canticles, especially in Matins and Vespers. Until additional information becomes available in the forthcoming desk edition, you can read a little about these canticles in the 108-page resource the Commission on Worship distributed to the 20,000+ people who attended the hymnal workshops in the fall of 2006. If you don't have a copy, or can't locate yours, CPH still makes it available on its website ([http://www.cph.org/images/topics/pdf/lsb/LSB\\_Guide-full.pdf](http://www.cph.org/images/topics/pdf/lsb/LSB_Guide-full.pdf)). That resource is filled with information and ideas for making a fuller use of *LSB*.

One additional example of how to dig more deeply into the hymnal is by making use of some of the resources in the Liturgical Music section (*LSB* 942-963). Here you will find different settings of nearly every part of the Divine Service. During Lent next year, consider singing the medieval expansion of the Kyrie (*LSB* 942) in place of the regular Kyrie. (This was the form of the Kyrie that our LCMS forefathers regularly sang from Walther's German hymnal.) Or perhaps simply have the choir sing an alternate setting of the Agnus Dei on behalf of the congregation once in a while. (The four-part setting at *LSB* 962, for example, lends itself well to being sung in harmony.) While you wouldn't want to substitute parts of the service every Sunday, when used on an occasional basis or perhaps for a season, these alternate settings allow these familiar texts to be heard in a new light.

While more examples could be given, I'll invite you instead to come and see for yourself. This fall (November 6-8, 2016), the conference of the Good Shepherd Institute held annually on the CTSFW campus will explore this very topic as we consider the development of hymnals in the LCMS. As it turns out, it's not only the tenth anniversary of *LSB* but also the seventy-fifth anniversary of *TLH* (and almost the thirty-fifth of *Lutheran Worship*). Our conference will take advantage of all these anniversaries to ponder where we've been and where we might be going in the future. If you've never attended before, it's a feast not only for the mind but especially for the ears with all of the singing and music making in services and hymn festival. You won't be disappointed.

Paul J. Grime

## Is It Time for Wedding Silliness to End?

The institution of marriage has been much in the news of late. Christians of a more conservative bent have gone from indifference to confusion to outright fear over what the future holds concerning the “union of this man and this woman,” as the service of Holy Matrimony in *Lutheran Service Book* puts it in the very first sentence of the wedding address. Our purpose in writing at this time is not to rehash recent changes regarding how our society views marriage; rather, we wish to raise a few questions concerning how the church conducts the service of Holy Matrimony. Simply put, is it time for biblically-minded Christians to ask some hard questions about the rubrics?

Many of us have heard the old adage that a pastor would prefer to do ten (insert your own number here) funerals to even one wedding. Why is that? Perhaps it’s the fear of having to work with the professional wedding coordinator. Or dealing with the preconceived notions of the bride who hopes to pull off the wedding of her dreams. How many pastors and church musicians have struggled to explain why the choice of this or that popular song really has no place in the service? And what about the other bizarre requests that pop up as weddings are being planned? Were we submitting this opinion piece as a blog post, undoubtedly our colleagues out in the trenches would quickly add their countless examples.

Far too often the church has regrettably permitted the conduct of the marriage rite to be hijacked by the whims of the secular culture. We make that statement, of course, with the full awareness that there are many pastors and musicians in our churches, along with devout lay men and women, who have worked carefully and faithfully to instill a sense of the holy at this most sacred time. Our humble proposal is that the time has come for us to redouble such efforts, especially by helping those who are preparing to enter this holy estate to recognize the import of the vows they are preparing to take. To put it another way, we’d like to suggest that the era of wedding silliness is over.

In his *Marriage Booklet*, which was included in the Small Catechism and thus in the Book of Concord, Martin Luther explained why pastors were obligated to bless the marriages of those who requested it: “For all who desire prayer and blessing from the pastor or bishop indicate – thereby whether or not they say so expressly—to what danger and need they are exposing themselves and how much they need God’s blessing and the community’s prayers for the estate into which they are entering. For we experience every day how much unhappiness the devil causes in the

married estate through adultery, unfaithfulness, discord, and all kinds of misery" (*The Book of Concord*; Kolb-Wengert, 368–69). Unquestionably, the devil's assaults on this holy institution have only multiplied in the centuries since Luther wrote these insightful words.

Given the current climate, with the world rejecting nearly every tenet we hold to be true concerning marriage, the time has come not only for the church to confess what she believes but also to practice what she preaches. This is not to say that the marriage rite must be conducted everywhere the same; there is always room for scaling the conduct of the service to the needs of the local community, with each individual wedding ceremony recognizing the unique characteristics of the man and woman who are being married. What we must not forget, however, is that our conduct does matter, and that if we are not careful, our practice can easily come to be at odds with our doctrine.

Thus, we offer the following, modest proposal. Above all else, we urge pastors to use the rite—the words—as provided in the hymnal and agenda. *Lutheran Service Book* is the first official hymnal of the LCMS to include the marriage rite in the pew book. This is significant in that it sets before our people a theological statement as to what God says about marriage. The framers of *LSB* worked carefully on this rite, especially in the prefatory statement on marriage and in the consent. Much of this was covered just a few years ago in a previous *Theological Observer*, where encouragement to stick with the rite was urged with this observation: "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" (*CTQ* 77 [July/October 2013]: 336). At the very least, can we agree that the days are gone of the bride and groom writing their own vows or pastors crafting their own services? The stakes are just too high.

Second, perhaps the time has come where we simply insist, in charity, that church weddings be seen as churchly events. In the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, one of the general rubrics reads: "As in all worship in the house of God, the rite of Holy Matrimony invokes the presence and blessing of God. Therefore, it should avoid triteness and empty sentimentality" (*LSB Agenda*, 64). Of course, there will be some difference of opinion as to what constitutes "triteness" and "empty sentimentality." But as the old evil foe prowls around looking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), insisting that the church shouldn't have the right to refuse to marry Fred and Steve, if that's what they desire—in that light, the era of triteness and empty sentimentality really does need to come to an end. The stakes really are that high.



Third, what this will look like in practice will require some courage on the part of our pastors. For example, what message is conveyed when the congregation remains seated as the processional cross passes by—if a processional cross is even used in a wedding procession—only to stand a minute later as the bride makes her entrance? A minor point, some might say. Really? As Christians by the thousands are forced from their homes in Iraq, Syria, and other countries, and as videos surface on the Internet of Christians dying for the faith, like the twenty-one Coptic Christians who were beheaded on the Libyan seashore in 2015, can we maintain that it doesn't "mean" anything for us to sit comfortably in our padded pews as the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ passes by? Perhaps as our culture begins to turn the screws more tightly on the church, showing less and less tolerance for our "quaint" beliefs, we will finally come to see that the pseudo-deification of the bride in the classic "American wedding" is not serving us all that well. There, we said it.

Yes, this will require courage. And it will have to start with our pastors. First, they must hold unquestionably to the biblical witness concerning the holy estate of marriage, and commend every husband and wife for their faithful confession as they unashamedly enter this holy estate. Second, with that conviction firmly in hand, they must aptly teach the flock they have been called to shepherd. They begin, naturally, by teaching what God has to say about marriage. But eventually that teaching must proceed to an examination of the practices that accompany the rite of marriage. In the case of the wedding procession referenced earlier, this may inevitably result in stepping on a few toes. "But that's the way we did it at our wedding, pastor," one member might protest during a Bible class. "Are you saying we were wrong?"

This brings us to an additional ingredient needed when dealing with such a sensitive topic. In addition to conviction, you bring a pastoral heart. Hopefully in raising this particular example, you don't use our snarky comment about the pseudo-deification of the bride, but explain it a little more charitably, as in: "Have you ever considered what message we send in choosing to remain seated as the cross passes by but then stand as the bride makes her entrance?" In response to the question about whether the practice used all these years was wrong, you might respond with the honest statement that you yourself hadn't really thought carefully about this before. And if it was the case that the congregation showed similar honor to your own bride at your wedding, then you might simply add, "That's what we did at our wedding too. And it never occurred to me back then what message we were sending." Honesty will go a long way.

There are any number of practices that will require a second look. Why is it, for example, that the wedding party stands throughout the service? Does that give the impression that we simply want to hurry up and get out? While that practice isn't wrong, what message would be conveyed if the bride and groom and their attendants instead sat down to hear God's Word? (Pastors shouldn't assume that this suddenly gives them license to preach a twenty-minute sermon!) Or what of the practice of treating those in attendance at a wedding as nothing more than mere spectators? If that isn't our standard practice at a Sunday service, then why should it be at a wedding? Invite the congregation to join in praying a psalm or singing a hymn. (The tunes for the three wedding hymns in *LSB* were carefully chosen because of their familiarity by most Christians.) Just because many of the attendees at weddings aren't regular churchgoers doesn't mean that we need to dumb down either our message or our practice.

Finally, we offer a brief comment about wedding venues. For decades the church has witnessed a gradual shift away from weddings inside the church building to other venues, with "destination weddings" more recently becoming all the rage. As we consider how our wedding practices might best support our teaching on marriage, perhaps the time has come to urge those who are marrying to bring the ceremony back into the sanctuary so that all who are present might give their full attention to God's holy desire for husbands and wives.

We have every confidence that in this marriage debate we have the word of truth on our side. We believe the time has come when that truth needs to be seen and experienced more intentionally in our practice. The era of wedding silliness needs to end. Because the stakes really are that high.

Paul J. Grime  
Kantor Kevin J. Hildebrand

### **What Angels Witness "through the Church"**

Ephesians 3:10 is a pericope that only appears in the lectionary on the Feast day of Epiphany, and is usually overshadowed by the Gospel reading, the story of the Magi visiting the holy family. Yet in this text St. Paul gives us a rare description of what human salvation means to the angels as they see it manifested in the church. He describes the gospel as "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the

angelic authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:9–11).

Because the gospel is about the salvation of God's foremost visible creatures, people tend to overlook the effect of the gospel on God's foremost invisible creatures. Yet, God's word does reveal something of the angelic reaction to the unfolding of his plan to show love and forgiveness to fallen humanity. What St. Paul contributes is the monumental insight that it was always God's intention that our salvation benefit the angels.

### I. Angelic Witness to Our Creation

Although Moses does not refer to it in the Torah, the book of Job reveals that the creation of God's visible creation was witnessed by his invisible creation. God asks Job the haunting question, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7). This question, in one of the earliest biblical witnesses, introduces the thought that human salvation is of immense interest to God's angels, both the holy and the unholy.

That theme of angelic interest in human salvation may be located throughout the Scriptures, as when St. Peter makes it known in his first epistle that angels are fascinated by the unfolding of our lives and the working out of God's plan to save us through the sacrifice of his Son, when he tells us that "angels long to look into these things" (1 Pet 1:12).

Consider what the angels had been witnesses to so far—perhaps even the creation of the material universe, depending on when one accounts for their creation. Would they have seen the Creator create anything else after creating them? If not, they would not have seen one of God's most wondrous abilities: his power to create something out of nothing. In Revelation 4:11, we see that part of the ceaseless worship of God is focused on his act of creating all things. Yet God did not create our universe only so that the heavenly hosts would worship him for doing so. The purpose of God's creation of our universe was to showcase not just his creative power but his love and mercy toward sinners. In order to demonstrate that he could forgive sin, God had to create other creatures, "a bit lower than the angels," who, after they also sinned, could be graciously redeemed and mercifully forgiven. Key features of God's character—his love and mercy, even to sinners, may not have been apparent to the angels, had God not created and redeemed human beings. All that they would have seen, among other things, would have been his condemnation, and punishment of sinners.

*To Demonstrate God's Proper Character to the Angels*

The holy angels would have witnessed the banishment and eternal condemnation of those angels among them who sinned. Every one of them could say, as Jesus later said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). But in seeing God's implacable justice in action, handing down damnation against rebel angels, the loyal angels would have only seen God's *opus alienum* ("alien work") of destroying that which is imperfect—hardly a complete picture of their Creator! When and how would they ever have seen God's *opus proprium* ("primary work"), flowing from his heart of love and compassion? How would they have seen him giving grace to the unworthy? When would they have witnessed his forgiving love? Where would they have seen a demonstration of the mercy of God that adorns the pages of Scripture?<sup>1</sup>

## II. Angelic Witness to our Redemption

God wanted the angels to see these aspects of his character, so he chose to create and redeem us. God knew the loyal angels would rejoice to see this and spend eternity worshipping him for it. Thus he created a creature ideally suited for this particular demonstration: man, with both a soul that could be saved, and a physical body that could die.

God's personal touch in the creation of the human form, foreknowing that he, in the person of his Son, would assume such a form, is well known from the first chapter of Genesis. Less well known is the fact that human beings, created "in the image of God," have a feature that all humans beings have, and that God himself did not have prior to the incarnation: the possibility of two kinds of death, spiritual and physical. In this respect human beings were created differently from both animals and angels. Animals, with no immortal souls, were created with only one death that awaited them, as a consequence of the Fall—namely physical death. Angels, too, although created to be immortal, could still face "death" if they sinned, and that one death would be, although not physical, nevertheless final and eternal. Everlasting death is their one and only

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<sup>1</sup> "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19). "Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?" (Ps 89:5-8).

death. Jesus taught that hell is an “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41).

*A Double Death, an Ideal Feature to Showcase Redemption*

To showcase the redemption of sinners, human beings can experience multiple deaths: they are born spiritually dead, they can experience a physical death even after spiritual rebirth, and they can experience an eternal spiritual death without rebirth in Christ (called “the second death” in Rev 20:14). Unique among all his creatures, these latter two deaths that humans can die each have a certain respective finality, yet they are not identical, and it is mercifully possible to experience the one, but not the other.

Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:13–15)

The option of these two deaths gives human beings a built-in advantage, not only advantageous to us, but also to God, who planned to use our physical death as the centerpiece of a grand demonstration of his love from the very creation of our world: the atoning sacrificial death of his Son to redeem human beings to God by his blood. “For God demonstrated his love for us in this way—that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

For those who recoil at the thought that God created us with the capability of physical death, even before the Fall, consider an historic bottle of brandy. It could be kept “eternally” in a museum, or it could “die” by having its cork removed and its contents poured out. Yet, how foolish it would be for that bottle to resent its “death.” It was obviously designed to have its cork removed and its contents poured out. Even after its first “death,” the brandy bottle would not have to undergo a second death (that is, be relegated to a landfill). It could live forever in someone’s prized bottle collection. God seems to have designed us well to serve the purpose of his glory. Seeing physical death this way almost rehabilitates it, or at least recognizes that human physical death serves a higher purpose by showcasing the surpassing love of God.

*Unlike Fallen Angels, Fallen Humans Are Not beyond Redemption*

Had humans been like the angels, with only a single kind of death (the eternal kind), then for Christ to demonstrate his love for us by sparing us

the punishment that we deserved and substituting himself instead under the judgment of God, God's Son would have to endure eternal death and be permanently separated from his Father—separating the persons of the Holy Trinity forever—hardly a practical option! But, as we humans are capable of being punished for sin with two kinds of death, Jesus could experience one of them (physical death), and his demonstration would still serve its purpose.

Through such a death, God—incarnate in the flesh—could redeem such creatures as us, in a way that he could not do for the angels that sinned. This is why the Scriptures tell us that “it is not angels he helps but Abrahams’s descendants. For this reason he (Christ) had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:16-17).

So the author to the Hebrews tells us, “Since the children have flesh and blood (another way of saying human mortality), he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb 2:14-18). Notice that it says, “He had to be made like his brothers.” Realistically, God could not make atonement for the angels that sinned, but he could make—and it was fitting to make—atonement to redeem his human creation.

### **III. The Eternal Purpose behind Human Redemption**

Knowing that his unique, beloved Son would have to endure a horrible death by crucifixion to give eternal life to sinners, even before the fall into sin, why would God proceed with the creation, let alone face the situation of a Father offering his Son a cup in a garden of tears, unless there was an immensely higher purpose, beyond merely creating another world. The angels may hold the answer to this question. Witnessing human creation and redemption, the angels were able to see, as they could not see in any other way, how the same just God who punished their rebel counterparts is also a merciful God who saves sinful creatures, even at incalculable personal cost.

#### *Why Create Something That Will Cause Your Beloved Son to Suffer?*

Because Christ's death successfully demonstrated that God was loving and merciful enough to redeem sinners at tremendous cost, both humans and angels benefited enormously, and God is glorified eternally as a direct result. Humans benefit, because we can be forgiven our sins and spared

from eternal death (an inestimable benefit!). Angels benefit, because only in our redemption could they observe God, their creator, showing mercy and forgiveness toward sinners without compromising his perfect justice—something they could never have seen had humans never been created, fallen into sin, and been redeemed through the atoning sacrifice of God's Son.

And, ultimately, God himself benefits, so to speak, because, as the result of what the crucified and risen Christ has done, both humans and angels join together to give him endless praise for the perfect combination of righteousness and grace that the redemption of humanity displays.

### *It Was the Perfect Plan*

How remarkable it is (by virtue of his incarnation and humiliation) to be able to say of the Son of God, "He understands the taste of death." He who created our material universe by the word of his mouth (Ps 33:6) and became part of this creation was made "lower than the angels" that he might redeem humans (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:7). He knows suffering. He knows pain. He knows anguish, disappointment, grief, sorrow and rejection. "He was stricken by God, smitten and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:4–5).

It was the perfect plan. The author to the Hebrews writes, "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb 2:10).

The author to the Hebrews also invites us to contemplate the wonder of the fact that it was for people like us that our Savior came. The Son of the living God made sinners to be his brothers by paying for them the ultimate price: "we see Jesus . . . he suffered death, so that, by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9).

This is the heart of the gospel—in which the holy angels never cease to delight—that almighty God did not just understand the plight of sinners. He offered them the ultimate help by sending his unique and beloved Son. God's Son, although he "existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being

found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8).

The Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 3:8, NIV) is the object of angelic adoration, whose saving gospel they witness unfolding through the church, and in each member of the church, "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:10).

This was the "eternal purpose" behind the creation of human beings. God created us to be redeemed, and he carried out his loving plan to demonstrate his redeeming grace, mercy, and love, by means of the atoning sacrifice of his Son, our Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing this eternal purpose unfold, those loyal angels of God who had not sinned sang for joy, and they still find God's demonstration of love toward us endlessly delightful.

#### **IV. Angelic Joy at the Accomplishment of Human Salvation**

Angelic worship of God, "innumerable angels in festal assembly," must not be accounted for as mere compliance with God's will, as soldiers might shout "Hurrah!" on command, or as joyful music that comes into our ears through the push of a button. Scripture gives us plenty of glimpses of angels worshipping God in heaven. But how often do we note that the worship that angels render to God is related to, among other things, their knowledge of the history of human salvation?

It is ultimately the only salvation they have ever seen, for no salvation was offered to any angel who sinned. Yet, although it is about the rescue from eternal damnation of another species (humanity), human salvation is a tremendous source of delight to the angels. Even the founding of the material universe itself made the angels shout for joy (Job 38:7).

Following this reasoning, it is easy to understand why "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). How the angels regard human salvation may be deduced from various narratives and visions in the New Testament:

1. Angels rejoice as witnesses to the creation of the material universe (Job 38:4-70).
2. Angels announce the birth in Bethlehem of the incarnate Savior, as a multitude of the heavenly host dazzle a group of shepherds. (Luke 2:13).



3. Angels minister to Jesus at crucial points in his suffering for human redemption (Matt 4:11; Luke 22:43).
4. Angels announce the resurrection, after Christ's work of atonement is finished, replacing weeping with joy that Jesus is risen (Luke 24:5).
5. Angels announce, at his ascension into heaven, that Jesus will one day return (Acts 1:11).
6. Angels remain "eager to look into these things" as the gospel grows the apostolic church (1 Pet 1:12).

The angels' joy at the beginning of our world, their singing in the skies over Bethlehem at the birth of God's Son, their interest in the redeeming work of Christ and the application of his merits to provide forgiveness to repentant sinners, and their ceaseless adoration in heaven of the Lamb that was slain, possibly suggests that the whole material universe was made as a demonstration to them of God's love as much as a demonstration to us.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, angelic joy over human salvation is the best explanation for their rending to the praises they do, "saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (Rev 5:8-12).

#### *Angels Learn Much about God's Wisdom through the Church*

The eternal, cosmic context of what the angels witness through the church is taught in Ephesians 3:7-11, when St. Paul writes, "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." By referring to an "eternal purpose," now revealed in human salvation by the "God who created all things," St. Paul gives us a strong hint as to why God created human beings in the first place. "Through the church," the angels would see a demonstration of God's love in action that they could see in no other way.

St. Paul gives us the concept of the gospel as demonstration in his epistle to the Romans, when he writes,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be

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<sup>2</sup> A "Grand Demonstration," as Jay Adams called it. Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration: A Biblical Study of the So-called Problem of Evil* (Santa Barbara: EastGate, 1991).

received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:23-26)

Yet it is in Ephesians 3:10 that St. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us the New Testament's most explicit statement about what a demonstration to the angels the gospel is. He writes,

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:7-11)

The gospel of human salvation, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24), is the wisdom of God that the holy angels witness in action "through the church." This is why St. Peter affirmed that, "concerning this salvation . . . it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet 1:12).

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### **"This is the Night"**

*[This sermon was preached at the Easter Vigil at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, on March 26, 2016. The Editors.]*

"This is the night!" At least five times in this Easter Vigil liturgy we have heard reference to "this night." This is the night when God brings our fathers out of Egypt and leads them through the Red Sea; this is the night when Christ rises triumphant from the dead; how holy and blessed is this night when we are delivered from bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil.

"This is the night." This exclamation resonates with the liturgy for the Jewish Passover. "Why is this night different from all other nights?" asks a child of the household. "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover," answers

the elder. The ancient liturgy of the Passover calls for present tense verbs. "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover" (Exod 12:27). It is the night when God spares the children of Israel. It is the night when Pharaoh must bow his knee at the name of the Lord. It is the night when Israel is transformed from slaves into sons.

"This is the night!" Yet, what does such a statement actually mean? Surely, the present tense is absurd to our modern enlightened minds. The death and resurrection of our Lord is now two thousand years in the past. The exodus of Israel is a four thousand year old event. Both events lie in ancient history; they belong to a primeval and unenlightened people; they are primitive events beyond our ability to verify by modern scientific standards. How can such ancient relics be described in the present tense? Is it not disingenuous to say that this is the night of Jesus' resurrection? Perhaps our liturgical language should be translated into more reasonable terms. Perhaps it would be better to say: "This is symbolic of the night," or "this represents those ancient events." Or maybe we can simply say: "this is the night when we remember the past, when we reminisce about ancient times, when we renew our nostalgia for the old days."

However, we must recognize that all such explanations are lies that proceed from the mouth of the devil. In the beginning, the devil seduced us by translating God's present command into the past tense: "Did God really say . . . ?" With these words, Satan turned Adam and Eve into modern historians struggling to recall and interpret ancient words, and this skepticism about the past brought forth despair for the future. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Indeed, this is the power of death: it fragments time, it limits our faith to the past, and it binds our hope to the distant future. It leaves us in the present with a mere nostalgia for yesterday and a despair concerning tomorrow. And so we come here tonight, like the women that once approached the tomb of Jesus; we come with mere memories of a man who once lived; we come straining to recall past miracles, past words, and past glories. We come to remember, but it is a remembrance conditioned by the power of death, and a remembrance governed by death always carries regrets—regrets that the past cannot be repeated, repristinated, or resuscitated, regrets that what once was will never be again, regrets that the future will dim our memories and cloud our recollections.

However, the remembrance of the dead is not the remembrance of Jesus to which we have been called. Against the devil's lies, against the power of death and the fragmentation of time, the church proclaims Christ, "the same yesterday, today, and forever; the beginning and the ending; the

alpha and the omega; his are time and eternity." "This is the night!" Tonight, the true light shines in the darkness; tonight, our Noah emerges from the bowels of the ark; tonight, our Isaac returns from the sacrifice to the embrace of his mother; tonight, the stone of our David penetrates the head of the great adversary; tonight, the voice of our Daniel rises again from the Lion's Den; tonight, our Jonah returns alive from the belly of Sheol. Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

"This is the night." Tonight, on this altar, all the verbs of salvation are in the present tense. For here Christ is not limited to the past, but lives in the present. It is the very flesh that was martyred in Abel, saved in Noah, called in Abraham, suffered in Job, spared in Isaac, triumphant in David, swallowed in Jonah, and incorruptible in the three youths of the fiery furnace that has been taken up by the Son of God from the Virgin Mary, put to death on the cross, raised on the third day, and now lives as our eternal atonement before the face of the father. This is the flesh and blood that is on our altar; here there is no more fragmentation, no more wall dividing us from the past, no more veil concealing the future, no more regrets about what once was, no more despair about what will be. For all is present here. "Today," Jesus says, "this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). "Behold, now is the acceptable time," proclaims the apostle, "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). Or, as our Lord declares to those grieving women at the tomb of their brother, who clung to a hope limited to the distant future: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

"This is the night!" If this is indeed true, dear friends, what can keep us from rejoicing as we come to this altar? Shall we not rejoice like the family of Noah finally emerging from the bowels of the ark? Shall we not be renewed like the old patriarch Jacob embracing Joseph, a son who was dead but now lives? Shall we not take heart like the soldiers of Israel to see Goliath fall? Shall we not, like them, leave our wall and rush with renewed courage into the battle? Shall our hope not be rekindled like Mary Magdalene as she recognizes the voice of Jesus calling her name? Finally, shall we not come to this altar with burning hearts like the Emmaus disciples as our eyes are now opened and we recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread?

Why is this night different from all other nights? Because tonight, Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

James G. Bushur

## The Human Case against Same-Sex Marriage

[Timothy Goeglein presented this essay on March 31, 2016, as part of a series at Valparaiso University entitled "Dialogue and Discernment: Seek First to Understand—A Conversation About Same-Sex Marriage." Goeglein was one of two panel members who supported traditional marriage while two other panelists supported same-sex marriage. The panel discussion was billed as "a respectful conversation, around a seemingly irreconcilable issue, designed to demonstrate non-contentious conversations in an ever growing contentious world." The Editors]

Same-sex marriage is not primarily about homosexuality, individual rights or equality. It is not even about marriage or family at its deepest point. It is about the fundamental essence of humanity. At its core, same-sex marriage questions our historic and collective understanding that humanity is *one* nature embodied in *two* mysteriously diverse but wholly equal forms: male and female.

Male and female are not merely cultural constructs. Consider what *National Geographic* has taught each of us about the remarkable and starkly different cultures of the world. For all their splendid diversity, they share a few immutable commonalities. All cultures have rituals for collecting, preparing, and eating food. Just as basic, all cultures have a system of marriage, some form of socially encouraged, permanent pair-bonding. And until the last few nanoseconds of human experience, it has *always* been between the two streams of humanity: male and female. There were no exceptions until the Netherlands embraced genderless marriage in 2001. So why this unbending universality? Is it because Focus on the Family, religious conservatives, and the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church everywhere and at every time forced this "view" of family upon all these helpless cultures? Marriage requires male and female because nature demands it. And as such, marriage transcends culture, politics, economics, religion, and law. It is *the* primary human institution; both anthropologists and theologians hold this as true.

Consider the word "matrimony": the stem *matri/mater* can be seen in many other words, such as maternal, matrilineal, or maternity. Marriage exists in all human cultures for the interest of the woman, the mother, making sure that the man who fathers her children is attached to her in a way that protects and provides for her. Do we still need this today? Human nature and culture demands it. Consider a term coined by the sociologist Dianna Pearce in 1978, "the feminization of poverty"; because

of the decline of marriage, too many women were being left to raise their children by themselves.

Marriage is humanly fundamental because it is the way we solve the primary paradox of humanity, that men are not women and women are not men, but both are human. It is the way we bring these two parts of humanity together in the most intimate and cooperative way. No other social union bridges this mysterious distance as marriage does. Because every society consists of these similar but different beings, every society finds it must have marriage. Marriage—and particularly monogamy—socializes men, protects women from unattached males, regulates sexuality, and ensures that the people who create the babies are the ones who provide for and raise the babies. Aristotle referenced this essential nuclear nature of the family in his *Politics*.

But the same-sex marriage experiment says that we can ignore all this, and the mighty river of human experience can be diverted in a genderless direction in the present age without harmful consequences. It is a short-sighted and arrogant proposition driven by adult wishes, eclipsing child and societal needs, and ignoring the pan-cultural wisdom of the ages. This experiment's biggest stumbling block is that male and female are not mere social constructs, regardless of how much we are told they are. Every human life is a beautiful declaration to the contrary, an advertisement of the boundless wonder of that mysterious union of masculinity and femininity. The advertisement expresses itself in two ways: existence and embodiment.

First, each of us is an endorsement of the wonder of male and female in our existence. Every human person is inconceivable without a significant contribution from both streams of humanity. Every breathing, wriggling human baby that makes a debut upon the earth is a flesh-packaged message from creation that man and woman as a functioning unit is a fantastic idea. Nature sends no such endorsement of genderless unions. Every one of us gained access to our existence by passing through the door of heterosexuality, by either mechanical or intimate binary union of sperm and egg. There are no other options. Biology is a rigid and close-minded gatekeeper.

Second, there are two complementary models of embodied persons: male and female. Sylviane Agacinski is a leader in the French feminist *parité* movement—and shares a son with Jacques Derrida—who points out in her book *The Parity of the Sexes* what was obvious to our grandparents: “One is born a girl or boy, one becomes woman or man. . . . This division, which includes all human beings without exception, is thus a dichotomy.

In other words, every individual who is not a man is a woman. There is no third possibility."<sup>3</sup> (Only 0.018% of the human population can be termed truly intersexed.<sup>4</sup>) The miracle of every male's existence as a male person is not only an important value statement about the significance of male, but also about female. For the male proclaims the virtue, wonder, and necessity of female simply by contrasting her in his "otherness." Female does this for male also. We would not be able to define old without a value called youth. This is why same-sex unions are fundamentally genderless. The yin gains its full essence in contrast with the yang and is of little meaning in a yang-less community.

The legalization of same-sex marriage and the resulting same-sex family, however, brings all these basic human realities into question. For if two men or two women are the functional equivalent of a male and female family, the only thing that the first couple needs from the former to start a family is their respective gametes. In order to make the next human generation, the male same-sex couple must go next door and borrow an egg from heterosexuality. This reduction of gender to reproductive material is dramatically evidenced in a lesbian mothers' website that sells little t-shirts and bibs for their babies that inform the world "My daddy's name is donor."

This is a radical deconstruction of humanity, reducing the profound mystery of male and female to mere differentiated reproductive material. This genderless rationale is why marriage licenses address the couple as "Party A" and "Party B" rather than the "bride" and "groom" or "male" and "female." It is also why birth certificates are increasingly asking for the name of "Progenitor A" and "Progenitor B." It is why activists are arguing for the possibility for a child to be assigned to more than two legal parents.

But our human nature as either male or female is much deeper than one's genitalia, sperm, or egg. If same-sex marriage is socially valid, then male and female are no longer essential for the family, and therefore, humanity. They are simply preferential. And children are denied their natural mother or father for no other reason than adults desire such families. This is precisely what Rosie O'Donnell told ABC's Diane Sawyer when she explained her little boy often asked, "Why don't I have a dad?"

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<sup>3</sup> Sylviane Agacinski, *Parity of the Sexes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sax, "How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling," *The Journal of Sex Research* 39 (2002): 174-178.

Her answer? “If you were to have a dad, you wouldn’t have me. Because I’m the kind of mother who wants another mother.”<sup>5</sup>

We hear that love makes a family, but can an abundance of love from two men turn one of them into a mother? Can any amount of love make a father out of a woman? A loving and compassionate society *always* comes to the aid of motherless and fatherless children; it *never* intentionally creates them.

Family configuration has always been intricately bound up with the structure and health of the larger community, and we cannot change it without significantly changing society. When we no longer have mores concerning the structure of marriage and family but settle for a buffet model—just pick what suits you, because one choice is as valid as another—society loses a shared norm without which it cannot function cohesively. This is why the male/female norm of marriage is humanly universal.

This is essentially what we believe at our core at Focus on the Family:

1. The marital union of male and female is exceptional and essential for human thriving.
2. Marriage should be loving, sacrificial, and life-long.
3. All children should have the benefit of being loved and cared for by their own mother and father.
4. Sexuality ought to be confined to the protective harbor of the intimacy of a husband and wife.

This is the sexual ethic that Jesus taught us. We have no right as Christians to say that he is too narrow here.

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Vice President of External Relations  
Focus on the Family

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Oldenburg, “Rosie talks adoption in coming-out interview,” *USA Today*, March 14, 2002, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/2002/2002-03-14-rosie.htm>.



## Offending a Postmodern World: The Prophet Speaks the Truth

### Introduction

It is unlikely that many of you recognize the name Susan Otey. She represents the demise of the prophetic office in many ways. Not only does she occupy an office not given to women, but, more significantly, she demonstrates this generation's intent to abandon the concept of truth and to substitute in its place feelings as criteria for making judgments.

On November 20, 2014, Susan Otey became the first Montana member of the clergy to officiate at a homosexual marriage. Although the action was contrary to the teaching of her denomination (United Methodist) and to the vows she took when she entered that profession, she had a ready answer: "I really *felt* that God was calling me to be part of that. . . . I would say that sometimes, to stand with the love of Jesus Christ for all people, you have to break a vow you've taken."<sup>6</sup>

Ms. Otey was able to leap at least three hurdles that previous generations have found daunting. The truth of God's word was a low hurdle, having suffered many attacks through the years as bound to the time in which it was written. The vows she made to God and to his people were no constraint, because she *felt* differently in the present than she did when she made them.

What might have stopped the modern mind in its tracks seemed the lowest hurdle of all. She is able to function without a concept of truth: "I spent a lot of time in prayer about it, trying to discern whether this was right for *me*. . . . I have this strong belief that God does not want any of His beloved children to *feel* shame."<sup>7</sup> Anthony Esolen, in an article on the missionary task in the twenty-first century, complains of this generation, "They judge by flights of feeling."<sup>8</sup> The indictment stands against Susan Otey. It was not an objective truth; it was not even the truth of the

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Olp, "Methodist Pastor Marries Same-sex Couple Despite Church Doctrine," *Billings Gazette*, December 4, 2014, Section A, [http://Billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/montana/metodist-pastor-marries-same-sex-couple-desptie-church-doctrine/article\\_f5d33b25-7537-5edb-9a86-235a90c35f8b.html#ixzz3LRXDm5BK](http://Billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/montana/metodist-pastor-marries-same-sex-couple-desptie-church-doctrine/article_f5d33b25-7537-5edb-9a86-235a90c35f8b.html#ixzz3LRXDm5BK); emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> Olp, "Methodist Pastor Marries Same-sex Couple Despite Church Doctrine"; emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Esolen, "Mission Nary Impossible," *Touchstone* 28, no. 1 (January/February 2015): 25.

attending circumstances that drove her decision. It was the absolutely insular drive of her feelings that lifted her over all obstacles to the contrary.

I am keen to note, from a modern perspective, the thickness of the irony attending the event of that wedding. Here stands a “pastor,” presumably chosen for the sake of the integrity of the office, asking two people to be faithful to their vows, while simultaneously breaking her own vow. Yet, judged by postmodern standards, the irony dissipates, for in the present world both actions are motivated by personal emotions, making them entirely consistent.

I intend in this present offering to demonstrate that we are rapidly moving in the direction of a world devoid of the concept of truth, which will create consternation for the prophetic office, an office dedicated to the proclamation of truth. I further hope to alleviate that consternation by pointing pastors especially to the power of truth to overwhelm even that barrier.

### **I. Speaking the Truth Offends the Postmodern World**

#### *Tolerance as Virtue*

The Christian faith is highly invested in the concept of truth. Jesus came into the world “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He characterizes his mission in terms of truth, “I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). Furthermore, Jesus promises his followers that they will know the truth and that the truth will set them free (John 8:32). He begins to reveal the content of this truth when he calls himself “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus promises that his followers will have help, because “[w]hen the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Finally, Jesus directs his followers to the place where they will find the truth, when he prays on the night before his death, “your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Christian commitment to a concept of truth has had a profound impact on the surrounding culture. During the Christian era, science, literature, and art all functioned with some concept of truth. Over the centuries the impact of that concept has eroded. In recent years, what many call postmodern thought has chipped away at the idea of truth: “Both Christians and modernists believe in truth. Postmodernists do not.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), 20.

Some authors note a contrast between Postmodern and Enlightenment thought:

The Enlightenment project . . . took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.<sup>10</sup>

Postmodern thought dismantles the Enlightenment devotion to a singular view representing the world, favoring instead a multi-faceted view of reality. However, the concept of truth is hard to kill, so the attack has continued through the modern era: “modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production,” while “fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or ‘totalizing’ discourses . . . are the hallmark of postmodern thought.”<sup>11</sup>

As with most periods of thought, the first phase of the postmodern era is distinguished by a plea for toleration. The United States has endured a phase during which toleration has been touted as the premier virtue toward which its citizens should aspire. The fragmentation of its people into various “tribes” based on actual or “perceived” characteristics sends the mind reeling. In the arena of gender, for example, the clear God-given gift of two (male and female) has been expanded to anywhere from five (LGBTQ) to a score or more. Each tribe, clamoring for its own version of reality, has demanded toleration for its facet of the truth, leaving those believing in an absolute truth to be branded as intolerant and bigoted.

During this phase, the prophet of God (i.e., pastors) might expect a voice in the market place as long as he is careful not to make any exclusive claims on truth. It has become common to hear even true prophets of God preface their comments with the qualification, “I believe . . .,” as if reference to our personal belief made room for everyone else’s personal belief on equal footing. By saying this, prophets may have found a place at the table in the past, but it will not last.

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<sup>10</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1989), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 9.

*Truth as Vice*

We are clearly in the second phase of the postmodern revolution. This is a period of time when the desire to maintain a concept of truth is seen as a weakness. The words of Allan Bloom in his 1987 work, *The Closing of the American Mind*, were prescient: "Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason's power."<sup>12</sup> His argument then was that in the halls of academia, the plea for toleration had been surpassed by the demand for a new order, one that denied the existence of truth. What once populated academia is now on the streets. In this truthless world the actions of Susan Otey make perfect sense. Her willingness to stare her vows in the face and walk away unblinking is a bold proclamation that we are squarely in the era of untruth. The antithesis of truth, in terms of human actions, is not falsehood. In fact, quite the opposite holds. As long as we can speak of falsehood, there must be an opposing truth to define it. The enemy of the prophet today is not falsehood but untruth. We have been "untruthed." Asleep too long in our ivory chancels we have awakened to find a strange new world, where the majority of citizens no longer function with truth as a category of their minds.

As a result, those who cling to a concept of objective truth are viewed as creatures from another planet. This dependence on "truth" is viewed as a weakness, a moral failure, characterized by a need to subject others to a dominant personal truth. In this world, any language about truth is seen as a vice—a ploy for power over others. Speaking of the graduates of our systems of higher education, Gene Veith writes, "Many of them are coming out convinced that there is no objective meaning and that truth is nothing more than an act of power."<sup>13</sup>

That said, humans cannot function without some criteria for making decisions. This is where being "untruthed" creates some friction with daily life. However, by its fragmentation to the individual level, postmodern thought has provided a convenient solution: "The intellect is replaced by the will. Reason is replaced by emotion. Morality is replaced by relativism. Reality itself becomes a social construct."<sup>14</sup> The action is subtle, but we have gradually become a nation governed by our feelings. This criterion has the added benefit of being unassailable to a reasoned argument. At least one generation has been convinced that "feelings are neither right,

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<sup>12</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 29; emphasis added.

nor wrong, they just are.” “But that’s how I feel” is the indignant answer you may receive upon the attempt to convince someone that their feelings are based on faulty information or have no basis in fact.

### *Two Kinds of Offense*

In this world, the prophet who presumes to speak an objective, even divine, truth will be sure to offend all his hearers. However, for the purpose of proposing a solution, let me delineate what I think to be two distinct kinds of offense. On the one hand, sinners are offended when we are told the truth, because we do not want to obey it. We do not feel that what we are doing is wrong. How can someone else judge us? No one else has the right to impose his version of reality on us. This kind of offense often garners headlines and generally wins the ballot of public opinion. In the recent debate over a non-discrimination ordinance in Billings, for example, those who held for the old morality were called “haters” who wanted to scuttle the freedom of people to love whomever they felt like loving.

There is another, more subtle and much more fragile offense. It may be helpful for prophets to acknowledge this type of offense. I am suggesting that sinners may be offended when they are told there is no truth. This offense is a result of the fact that God’s law is written on their hearts. The truth of the law in a man’s heart will create a subtle internal conflict when that heart hears that there is no truth. The good news is that this conflict plays out in the minds of those whose consciences have not been seared. They may even go so far as to realize that a world without truth will become extremely chaotic. The bad news is that consciences can be seared to the point that they agree that there is no truth. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared” (1 Tim 4:1-2). If it is true that a vestige of the testimony of the law remains, those tasked with speaking the truth might be able to take advantage of it.

### **A Brief Excursus on the Intent of the Art to Offend**

There is an element of American societal structure that has attempted to bend to its advantage the human propensity to take offense. From earliest times human beings used symbols to represent the reality they dealt with every day. There are exceptions, but for the most part, from the time of cave dwellings through the period of the Renaissance, artists sought to reflect the truth of their observations of reality through their art.

By the late nineteenth century, artistic movements such as Impressionism and Cubism gave up strict representations and began to aim at evoking feelings in the observer of the art. This trend has continued to this day. Now, under the influence of postmodern thought, many artists, eschewing the idea of truth, simply try to offend the audience as a means of breaking down claims of truth, as well as oppressive systems supposedly designed to deceive through the illusion of meaning.

Wendell Berry, decrying the destruction of community, offers an interesting example of a 1989 play that had come to Louisville, Kentucky. The author had confessed that he wrote the play for the purpose of offense. My interest here is not in the quality or the purpose of Kopit's play, but in Berry's article about the play merely as an example of the conventionality of the artistic intention to offend—and the complacency of the public willingness not to be offended but passively to accept offense. Here we see the famous playwright coming from the center of culture to a provincial city, declaring his intention to "offend almost everyone," and here we also see the local drama critic deferentially explaining the moral purpose of this intention.<sup>15</sup>

The moral purpose, according to the author of the play, was to react to the apathy that is "corrupting American life."<sup>16</sup> I find the intent to offend an interesting tactic. More to our point is Berry's assessment of the American public's willingness to accept offense as a tactic. If this is true, the prophet may find solace in the precedent that the giving of offense is not without its effect.

#### *An Application: Closed Communion*

Wendell Berry's concern that the postmodern mind will result in the disintegration of community ought to drive every pastor to consider the health of his congregation. A more specific application can be made to the pastoral practice of closed communion. When the concept of truth has been eliminated, there is no longer a basis for a public confession. That is, the postmodern mind can conceive of no totalizing discourse to which it ought to submit. It will only allow for the various perspectives of independent observations, or worse, transient feelings. The idea of making a public confession based on the unchanging confession of a group of believers does not make any sense. There is no such category in this postmodern mind.

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<sup>15</sup> Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 154.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, 154.

When a visitor to your congregation comes calling, he will often appeal to his feelings of unity with all believers as the basis for entrance to your table. If he were to plead that his personal confession was that of your congregation, and you were to press him with regard to his contrary public confession as a member of another “denomination,” you would doubtlessly confuse him. He would most likely deny any commitment to a public confession, because no one can tell him what to believe. The fallout of the inability to conceive of an objective truth is everywhere.

## II. Speaking the Truth Is the Prophet’s Calling

### *Speaking the Truth Is the Proclamation of the Gospel*

I speak unabashedly of prophets, that is, pastors—men in the office of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is an eternal truth. I am not intent on positing a judgment as to whether the time of your exile is more difficult than that of any other prophet. I am intent on pointing out a key characteristic of the time in order that you may take advantage of it. The line between a world with truth and a world without truth is a bottomless chasm. The longer we refuse to accept this reality the more precipitous our fall.

God has called pastors to speak the truth of the gospel. Speaking to the church at Ephesus, Paul reminds the saints that the gospel of Jesus is the absolute truth: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13). When closing his second letter to the congregation in Corinth, he emphasizes his commitment to the truth: “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).

Although in a different context, Paul’s proclamation of the truth also met resistance. So his manner of proclamation is still instructive for you: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:1-2). When faced with people who do not seem to understand, who are working without a concept of truth, it is tempting to lose heart. It is tempting to tamper with the truth when its proclamation may mean persecution.

It is a matter of fact that many within the Church have given up the open statement of truth in favor of more manipulative methods. Some even go so far as to say that insisting on the Scripture as the truth of God's word is an archaic form of biblicism. Tampering with God's word in an attempt to wedge it into today's understanding of the individual's responsibility to construct reality is fair game for some. The prophet suffers persecution from within and from without.

So what are we to make of Paul's confidence? What is stunning about this statement, especially from the postmodern perspective, is that his confidence is not founded in the method. He is not selling the three easy steps to truth telling. He is not giving us a process by which we will find success. Paul's confidence is in the truth itself. Simply speak the truth, he says. There is no need first to convince the audience that such a thing as truth exists. Prophets simply speak the truth and let the truth do the work that it claims it can do.

This then is the proper response to the postmodern deconstruction of truth. While the Evangelical world pumps out more books taking the rational approach (e.g., *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*), the Lutheran tactic is to depend on the power of the word. Those who do not believe that truth exists are less susceptible to the rational approach. However, the creation of a new category of the mind is a divine prerogative. Only God's word can do that.

#### *Speaking the Truth Preserves the Physical World*

The true prophet does not accept the "untruthed" version of the postmodern world. He recognizes it as one more deception springing from the father of lies. When Satan tires of attacking the truth itself, he is capable of attacking the concept. If he can convince our hearers, or even us, that truth is simply an unnecessary category of the mind, he may have gained some ground.

But it is a dangerous surface for humanity. A world without a concept of truth devolves into chaos, and the tide of chaos is only stemmed by the strong man. This era was prefaced for us during the time of the judges. It was a time when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6). What God used to preserve the nation of Israel at that time was not the rule of law, but the power of the dictators, then known as judges.

This prospect looms on the horizon for our nation. It may be difficult to imagine, but one's proclamation of the truth could result in the preservation of the physical life of one's neighbor. There is evidence that our heavenly Father uses the prophetic pronouncement of the truth for such a



purpose: "You are the salt of the earth" says Jesus (Matt 5:13). (The dominant function of salt at the time being the preservation of food.) "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you," says Solomon (Prov 3:1-2). "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you," says Moses (Exod 20:12).

Truth is a gift of God to his creation. An understanding of the concept of truth pays dividends, not only for the sake of spiritual life, but also in this life, as it assists the hearer to conform his life to the reality of God's creation. Consequently, one reason the prophet speaks the truth is for the sake of his neighbor's physical welfare. Truth facilitates order and peace; falsehood facilitates chaos and destruction.

#### *Speaking the Truth Frees its Hearers*

"What is truth?" (John 18:38). As when these words were spoken during the trial of Jesus, so today these words could have various meanings. Was Jesus' judge angry? Was he resigned, sarcastic, or interested? We cannot know Pilate's attitude, but we can be assured that with regard to the existence of an absolute truth we will experience these reactions and more from our listeners. The prophet must be prepared for anger, resignation, sarcasm, interest, and a hundred other emotional responses.

The question "What is truth?" is significant, because it reminds us of likely responses that today's prophets will hear. But more important than the question is the statement that prompted it. Here Jesus summarized his ministry in terms of truth. Jesus said to Pilate, "For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). In these words we have both gift and promise. Jesus has come into this world to bear the gift of truth. Since Jesus defines his purpose in this way, his prophets would do well to think of their service in the same way. You are called to bear witness to the truth. The promise of this text is overwhelming. Those who are of the truth will listen to the voice of Jesus. Of this you can be certain. However, since the prophet cannot know beforehand who are of the truth, he will speak the truth broadly and boldly. In speaking the truth of the gospel, the prophet can be confident that he is bearing the voice of Jesus into the world.

The voice of Jesus holds the key to freedom. Bound by sin, lost in error, untruthed to the point of death, there are countless souls that need to be set free. The postmodern world says that the claim to having truth is a

deception designed to keep people in bondage to those who have created the illusion of truth. On the contrary, the cruelest bondage is to the capricious taskmaster masquerading as emotion. Jesus says that truth sets people free: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32).

The office to which pastors have been called is not one of sterile rhetoric. It is no duty of family-oriented entertainment. The words that they speak make the difference between truth and falsehood, between freedom and bondage, between life and death. When they speak the truth of the Gospel of Jesus it sets people free from bondage. This is a high calling, so pastors dare not let the prospect of offense stand in the way. Prophets to a postmodern world trust the truth to overwhelm the offense.

### Conclusion

Imagine how many Susan Oteys have listened to a faithful pastor's proclamation of the truth. Carefree with regard to the truth, groping their way down the cold, dark hallway of life until they would have stumbled into the grave, they had been clueless that there was another whole world filled with grace and truth.

What if that proclamation offended them by pulling back the curtain on the obscenity of an absolute? What if they were disturbed by the thought that they might have been wrong? What if they responded with anger and sought to harm such a prophet? But what if God created in their minds a category to which they had never before been introduced? What if something miraculous came about through that "offense" proclamation to the truth? "What ifs" are the domain of the Divine, not ours. Whether or not they heard the truth in the voice of Jesus, the pastor will have fulfilled his calling. To bear witness to the truth—this is how God uses his prophets!

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## Book Reviews

**He Alone Is Worthy!: The Vitality of the Lord's Supper in Theodor Kliefoth and in the Swedish Lutheran Liturgy of the Nineteenth Century.** By Naomichi Masaki. Göteborg: Församlingsförlaget, 2013. 478 pages. Hardcover. \$59.85.

In this volume, a revision of his doctoral dissertation, Masaki introduces readers to the liturgical theology of Theodor Kliefoth (1810–1895), the nineteenth-century confessional Lutheran from Mecklenburg, and to the liturgical revisions of the nineteenth-century Swedish liturgy, focusing on the peculiar wording of the *Preface* in the liturgy of Lord's Supper, published in the 1894 Swedish Agenda. In the agenda, the final sentence of the dialogue, rather than the traditional rendering "It is right and proper," receives a christological interpretation: "He alone is worthy of thanks and praise!" Masaki traces the origin of this phrase through the Swedish theologians U.L. Ullman and E.G. Bring, through various proposals of liturgical revision, back to the theology of Kliefoth. Although not the originator of this phrase, Masaki argues that Kliefoth's liturgical thought, in his emphasis on the centrality of the *Amt Christi* and the downward movement of the means of grace from Christ to his Church—through  $\delta\acute{o}\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and  $\lambda\eta\psi\iota\varsigma$ —provided the theological grounding for the development of this translation.

One of Masaki's goals in this volume is to provide an example of an alternative methodology for Lutheran liturgical theology. Masaki maintains that the presuppositions and conclusions of contemporary liturgical studies are inimical to Confessional Lutheran theology at various points (Appendix 1). This page from the liturgical history of the Swedish Lutheran Church details a Lutheran model for future liturgical scholarship and revisions.

This work, at first blush, may seem esoteric, but it is far from being a specialist's monograph. Masaki provides much to consider for subsequent Lutheran liturgical studies.

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