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## Theological Observer

### **“Guard the good deposit entrusted to you”: Is Reading High-Octane Theology Practical for the Parish Pastor?**

*The following is a convocation presentation given by the Rev. Joshua Hayes at Concordia Theological Seminary on April 5, 2017. He was commissioned by the MDiv class of 2017 to translate Johann Gerhard’s commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy,<sup>1</sup> and is currently pastor of University Lutheran Chapel, Boulder, Colorado. —The Editors*

The demands made of the parish pastor are many and diverse. Often the temptation is to sacrifice time spent in the Word and in theology for the sake of doing or reading things of a more practical nature. I wish first to look at Johann Gerhard’s commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and tell you why I appreciate it, with the aim of providing the pastor himself with a justification for reading high-octane theology in a busy parish. This work is a true gift to the church that you have assisted to produce, and it will serve you well as you make your final preparations for entering the teaching office. I hope you benefit from reading it as much as I have from translating it.

But since I do not have to sell the book to you, I don’t want to spend too much time on that aspect. Instead, I would like to use the book and some other resources and thoughts to tackle the question with which I titled this presentation: “*Guard the good deposit entrusted to you*”: *Is Reading High-Octane Theology Practical for the Parish Pastor?* The pastor is a guardian of the deposit, and this is war. In the words of Gerhard: “As in war, so also in the episcopacy there is perpetual fighting, vigilance, labor, and danger in the face of the enemies.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, quit you like men; keep reading theology!

#### **What is good or helpful about this commentary by Gerhard on 1 & 2 Timothy?**

I first had contact with this work when I was on vicarage in Southern Illinois. For some reason or another I stumbled upon it online and thought that I should study the pastoral epistles and use this commentary as a guide. At that time I did not read all of it, but I did read much of it. I was able to do so because of its brevity. We tend to associate Gerhard with prolixity and a dogmatic text so long that it will keep CPH busy for twenty years (and that is just the *Theological Commonplaces*, not to

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<sup>1</sup> The commentary has now been published: Johann Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, trans. Joshua J. Hayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, 26.

mention the *Catholic Confession* and all the rest!). But there is a time for the pastor to be long-winded, and there is a time to be concise. This work is a great example of concision (which we also find in his *Sacred Meditations* and Latin homilies). It is not a full commentary in the “Concordia Commentary” sense of the word, but is more a collection of notes (*Adnotationes*). This volume is helpful for showing what the notes of a theological heavyweight like Gerhard would look like were he to prepare to teach a Sunday morning Bible class. Not that one would necessarily go about preparing to teach in the same way, but here is a great example of what substance and concision can look like. (See his *Method of Theological Study* for more information.<sup>3</sup>)

Besides the format and concision, the content is also noteworthy. Gerhard gives some good answers to tough questions, and he answers them in a way that pastors can present to the laity. For example, one cannot get through a Bible study on 1 Timothy without loosing the knot of 1 Timothy 2:15, “She will be saved through childbearing.” The answer Gerhard gives is both concise and satisfying (p. 37):

(1) The apostle’s aim is to comfort women over against the subordination imposed on the female sex as a punishment and also against the other part of that punishment, namely, their vexation and torment in bearing and rearing children: their eternal salvation is not hindered by these punishments.

(2) The sense, therefore, is: “God made and called the woman to bear children and rear them in the fear of God, not to teach in the church. If she remains in this, her vocation, and perseveres in faith and love she is saved, even though pain in childbirth has been imposed on her as a punishment.”

(3) The preposition διὰ [“through”] is used for ἐν [“in”], a usage that occurs in other statements of Scripture as well. Acts 14:22: διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων, “through many tribulations” (among many tribulations) “we must enter the kingdom of heaven.” That is to say, the variety of tribulations does not hinder our entrance into the kingdom of heaven. 2 Corinthians 6:7–8: ἐν λόγῳ ἀληθείας, ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ, διὰ τῶν ὀπλῶν τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῶν δεξιῶν καὶ ἀριστερῶν, διὰ δόξης καὶ ἀτιμίας, διὰ δυσφημίας καὶ εὐφημίας. [“In the word of truth, in the power of God, through the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, through glory and dishonor, through cursing and praise.”] Galatians 4:13: δι’ ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην. [“Through the weakness of the flesh I

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On Interpreting Sacred Scripture and Method of Theological Study*, Theological Commonplaces I–II, trans. Joshua J. Hayes, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 133–241.

preached the Gospel.”] 1 Peter 3:20: “Eight souls were saved δι’ ὕδατος (through water),” that is, “the water of the flood notwithstanding.”

(4) Therefore the apostle is not talking about the cause, merit, or means of salvation, nor even about a needed quality of those to be saved but about a condition and state that does not hinder salvation . . .

I can testify to the good mileage of that answer, and have incorporated it in my own words to students surrounded by feminist indoctrination at the University of Colorado—Boulder. It is satisfying because of its exegetical depth. Well-catechized Lutherans know that salvation is not from childbearing or any other work of ours, yet to some that sounds like what Paul is saying. If Paul is wrong, then what becomes of the inerrancy of Scripture? Pastors cannot be dismissive of these concerns, and Gerhard here gives a model of how to resolve such concerns from Paul himself and the language of the NT.

#### Is reading theology practical?

I want to move on to my second purpose, which is to provide the pastor himself with a basis for reading what I am calling “high-octane” theology. By that I mean theological writings that are deep, perhaps lengthy, and which require slow reading and mental exertion, or even rereading. High-octane theology is not the sort of thing a pastor would read with groups of laity or that he would necessarily quote directly in a sermon. High-octane theology includes works like Pieper, Gerhard’s *Theological Commonplaces*, the textual notes section of a Concordia commentary that we often skip over when hurriedly looking for a quick answer, much of Luther, and much of the Lutheran Confessions. High-octane theology really includes any strenuous theological reading that might not seem immediately practical, that is not written at a popular level, or that is not read in one’s mother tongue. It is not “I need a quick sermon idea” reading. Of course, these other types of reading are valuable also as a way to learn how better to communicate complex theology in simple ways.

But with so many demands made on the pastor’s time, with so many sermons to write and so much “ready to chew” theology out there already, can a pastor justify *to himself* spending a few hours of his week reading Gerhard subdividing Aristotelean causes or reading Luther wax on about the virtue of pagan Cicero? I believe that whether he serves in the bean fields of Nebraska or among the wacky liberals of Boulder, Colorado, that he can and that he should. But, I also believe that it is hard to do.

Please note that I am not speaking about how a pastor is to justify his use of time to his elders, wife, senior pastor, or anyone else who may justly or unjustly

think it is their business. I am talking about *the individual pastor*. Nevertheless, though most would agree that strenuous study of theology is worthwhile it often becomes hard for the pastor to justify this use of his time *to himself*. There is always someone else to visit, another phone call to make, or a sermon that could be a little (or a lot!) better. At home, the pastor could always be home a little sooner, and put in a little (or a lot!) more time as husband and father. When these and a thousand other things pile up, the temptation just to “get things done” can preclude ongoing theological study.

No doubt you have had the mantra “Visit, visit, visit!” pounded into your heads through the course of your studies. I hope you have. But I also want to urge you to read, read, read, because we are addressing what St. Paul says to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:13: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” You have heard it said: “They’ll never care how much you know unless they know how much you care.” This statement is true enough, but on the other hand, it will not matter how much you care if you do not know anything substantive. “Wear out a pair of shoes in your first year” is good advice, but try also to move up a prescription level on your glasses from reading so much.

I want to be clear that you should not ignore this advice about visiting. In fact, when I asked my wife what I should say to you, she said: “This is your chance to tell the Fort Wayne guys not to be dweebs.” So here it is, from my wife who is wiser than I: “Don’t be dweebs!” It’s okay to be a theological dork like I am, but don’t be a dweeb about it. You will do a lot of damage if you fail in your vows to visit the sick and shut-in. Do not think that things are below you. Do not take yourself too seriously. Take your office and duty seriously. G.K. Chesterton once wrote: “Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly.”<sup>4</sup> So you also, take yourselves lightly and don’t be dweebs.

But let us not create a false antithesis. It must not become either/or. “Get the message straight. Get the message out.” The two go together. President Harrison himself is a great example. Most pastors need to hear the admonition to visit and learn our people because most of us are tempted that way—we are more inclined to read and speak than to visit and listen. But one can fall off the horse the other way and become the social butterfly pastor with shallow sermons and therapeutic Bible classes. There is a real temptation to have a falsely-guilty conscience when it comes to study of the word. In other words, when I visit the shut-in or counsel with a student in my study I always feel great because I have done something concrete and practical. But if I spend three hours reading Gerhard I have nothing concrete to

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<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 223.

show for it and the shut-in still needs visiting and my sermon is no further along than when I began reading. In the latter case, I begin to wonder if I have wasted my time, a thought which itself betrays a lack of confidence in the sufficiency and value of the Word of God to make the pastor, “the man of God, complete, well-instructed for *every* good work” (2 Tim 3:17).

So when the devil comes to tempt you that the ongoing, strenuous study of theology is a waste, or that you have no time for it, or that it is just for seminary professors but impractical for the parish pastor, I offer the following remedies:

The reading of high-octane theology is (1) commanded by God, (2) service and worship to God in Spirit and truth, (3) necessary for good preaching and teaching, (4) a remedy for theological loneliness, (5) a reminder to humility and what Paul calls “complete patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

*The study of theology is commanded by God.*

In the ordination rite the ordinand is asked: “Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions?”<sup>5</sup> Diligence requires more than doing the bare minimum. Diligence requires the inclusion of high-octane theology. It is here that I would like to return to 1 and 2 Timothy, a major emphasis of which is that Timothy, and those pastors whom Timothy will instruct and ordain, “guard the good deposit.” Paul writes, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you” (1 Tim 6:20). And again,

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you (2 Tim 1:12–14).

Paul uses the language of a soldier entrusted to guard and deliver a precious cargo, something that the enemy seeks to steal, mutilate, or destroy. Paul writes in 1 Tim 1:18–19: “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.” Gerhard notes: “[The warfare] is against false teachers and the persecution of the world for the defense of the Gospel. ‘That you present yourself strenuous and strong in opposing the reign of Satan and spreading the reign of Christ. That you strenuously and manfully carry out your

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<sup>5</sup> LSB Agenda, 166.

office.’ As in war, so also in the episcopacy there is perpetual fighting, vigilance, labor, and danger in the face of the enemies.”<sup>6</sup>

Note too that St. Paul connects “having faith” with “having a good conscience.” Can the parish pastor be justified in spending time reading “impractical theology”? He should think so. For the man of God who fights in this war and keeps faith and remains faithful—he is the one, says the apostle, who may have a good conscience. Studying and training in theology so as to become a better guardian of the deposit can never be a waste. In fact, it is “inseparably intertwined” with having a good conscience.

To be clear: What is this deposit that Timothy and all pastors are to guard? It is the deposit of pure doctrine, for which the man of God must fight to keep sound. On 1 Tim 6:20 Gerhard quotes from Vincent of Lérins:

What is the deposit? It is what is entrusted to you, not what has been discovered by you. It is what you have received, not what you thought up. It is not a matter of talent but of the teaching, not of private usurpation but of public tradition. It is a thing delivered to you, not invented by you. In this you should not be the author but the guardian, not the institutor but the follower, not leading but following. “Guard,” he says, “the deposit. Preserve inviolate and unscathed the talent of the catholic faith. What has been entrusted to you—may it stay with you and be handed down from you. You have received gold. Return gold. Do not add for me some things instead of others.”<sup>7</sup>

*The study of theology is service and worship of God in spirit and truth.*

In Romans 12 the apostle reminds all Christians that the renewal of the mind, the *νοῦς*, is itself service to God: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” If this is true for all Christians—that we are “no longer to be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine but we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:14–15)—then this should be all the more true for teachers of Christ’s flock. This leads me to include the following point along with this second one, namely that

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<sup>6</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, 105.

*The study of theology is necessary for good preaching and teaching.*

You see, the pastor is in constant output mode when preaching, teaching, visiting, etc. If he is to avoid preaching the same formulaic sermon every Sunday, his mind (*voũς*) needs constant renewal. As a rule, I find that the pastor must take in two or three times what he puts out to keep his mind fresh. As Paul tells Timothy (2 Tim 2:6): “It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.” Gerhard notes that, “Just as the farmer who has tirelessly toiled in cultivating his field receives the fruits and growths there first before all others, so also you, Timothy, if you tirelessly toil in cultivating the Lord’s field (which is the church), then prior to your hearers you will receive the fruit of your toil—that is, a distinct glory and blessedness in heaven.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, before his hearers can benefit from the pastor’s study of the Word, the pastor should benefit himself.

Moreover, studying high-octane theology goes a long way toward this mental refreshing and renewal. Much of the value I gain from reading precise authors like Gerhard lies in the clarity of his thought, which is often much more orderly than Luther. Learning how to make proper distinctions and, yes, how to use (not abuse) philosophy and logic goes a long way for fruitful preaching and teaching. This is something in which the mind must be trained by continued reading, writing, and study. Such a skill is also your most useful tool for handling the inevitable strange comments and false assertions a pastor hears, not with a flat-out rebuke, but by ferreting out the kernel of truth, making proper distinctions, and teaching people how to think, with “complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2) in a world that has lost its *voũς*.

*The study of theology in the parish is a remedy for theological loneliness.*

Some of you will be called to parishes filled with lay people who already enjoy studying the Bible and theology. You will have a great winkel that reads the Greek and Hebrew and dives deep into all kinds of theological study. You will have many pastors close to you for support. But many more of you will end up serving in remote areas where anti-intellectualism dominates and where the nearest pastor is an hour or more away. You will attend winkels with pastors who know all the latest fads and Rick Warren books, but who have not looked at the Greek New Testament in decades. You will serve parishes where doctrinal indifference, acedia, and moral therapeutic deism hold sway. As you serve patiently and lovingly in such circumstances, it can get lonely. The internet is a huge help, but you need a theological friend even as you need a confessor. Maybe that will be a brother pastor

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<sup>8</sup> Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, 136.

or an elder in your congregation. More than likely, though, such a friend will come to you in book form. Walther, Luther, Gerhard, Augustine, Chemnitz—choose a friend and stick with him. There are times when I feel like Gerhard is a seminary professor who visits me in my study and in my basement. We talk. True, the conversation is a little one sided, but if Petrarch could write letters to Cicero a thousand years after the fact, then I can be justified in calling Luther and Gerhard my theological buddies. Sometimes I quibble with them, but mostly I learn and discuss with them.

Theological loneliness is real. At the seminary you are surrounded by people who live for theology, but it will not be that way in the parish. There are conferences, yes, but what about the day-to-day? Find a theological friend and get to know him. Even if you never quote him directly, your teaching will benefit. And if you get to know him well enough, you might just start to convince some of your people to care about his teaching, too. For many Lutherans, Luther is more a heroic, historical figure than teacher of the church. But get excited about him, know him, give your parishioners digestible portions of the Large Catechism, and you might just transform your congregational leaders from pragmatists into budding theologians.

*Digression: But when?*

Before I conclude with my fifth and final point on humility, I would like to take a minute to address the practical question: But when? When and how will I do this? *How do you balance academic-theological work with the other duties of the ministry?*

*Most of all: kill busyness, ruthlessly.*

One of the best writers on pastoral business is not a Lutheran but the author Eugene Peterson. In *The Contemplative Pastor* he writes on the word “busy” and how this adjective should never be used to describe the pastor. According to Peterson, the busy pastor is not committed but compromised. Busyness is not to be equated with faithfulness but with a spiritual malady. We grow busy because we want to seem important—which is vanity—or because we are lazy and allow others who do not understand the duties and demands of the ministry to dictate our schedules. Much of this amounts to what Hilary of Poitiers called an “*irreligiosa sollicitudo pro Deo*,”<sup>9</sup> a blasphemous anxiety to be in God’s place.

To these thoughts from Peterson I would add that an additional cause for busyness is the anxiety we bear of making sure that we are truly earning that paycheck. But the Office of the Ministry cannot be quantified or expressed in terms of numbers

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<sup>9</sup> “On the Trinity,” IV.6, where context is that Hilary is defending the eternity of the Son and the *homoousion* “as if by confessing that He has existed eternally, we made His birth impossible.” It may have been “de Deo” not “pro Deo,” but the point remains.

and sales figures. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 9 is not just for the laity to know that they must support their pastor, but also so that the pastors themselves will not feel guilty when they see that their salary is most of the church budget. It is God-pleasing to make a living from preaching the Gospel (1 Cor 9:14).

I still remember my first year as pastor reading the epistle for Sexagesima Sunday from 2 Cor 11. Paul is listing his sufferings and says: *χωρίς τῶν παρεκτός ἡ ἐπίστασις μοι ἢ καθ' ἡμέραν, ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν* ["Besides external things, there is the daily anxiety I have, my anxious thought for all the churches." (2 Cor 11:28)]. Not even a year into the ministry and that sentence cut me to the marrow. I had begun to know what the apostle meant—and you will too. You will worry, and that worry will tempt you toward busyness, which is really, as Luther reminds us, that old demon *acedia*. Note that Paul lists this anxiety at the summit of his list of sufferings. It is not a good thing but a weakness of his that he confesses. As St. John of Damascus observes: "Fear is divided into six varieties: viz., shrinking, shame, disgrace, consternation, panic, anxiety . . . Anxiety is fear of failure, that is, of misfortune: for when we fear that our efforts will not meet with success, we suffer anxiety."<sup>10</sup> But fearful anxiety is not a fruit of the Spirit, for it comes from the evil one. Paul writes in 1 Tim 1:7: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Commenting on this, Gerhard notes:

Therefore the sense is: "God has not given us a Spirit of *δειλίας* (fear), which very often hinders those to whom God has given outstanding gifts from using them for the church's benefit, but rather they allow them to be extinguished and die out within themselves." Here "fear" means human or worldly fear, and also that perverted modesty by which one is afraid to perform the things belonging to his office, such as (in the ministry of the church) preaching the Gospel, reproofing delinquents, etc.

*Δειλίας* signifies timidity, weakness of courage [*animi*], avoiding the dangers one must face in his vocation. To this is opposed *ἀνδρεία* ["manliness, bravery"]. In this passages the apostle sets *δυνάμεως* ["power, strength"] in opposition to it, for it follows in the antithesis.<sup>11</sup>

Loeche summarizes the temptation well (from *Three Books on the Church*):

It does not consider it an insult, nor is it eager to interpret it as an insult, when someone says, "This pastor thinks it is enough if he preaches, catechizes,

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<sup>10</sup> John of Damascus, "Exposition of the Orthodox Faith" 2.15, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952–1957), 291.

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, 120.

administers the sacraments, bears confessions, and comforts the sick!” It knows that even the most faithful pastors do not do enough of this. It has little use for multiplying pastoral duties but treasures those which are commanded in the Scriptures and have been recognized since ancient times. To many people it is something novel that a man should not be a jack of many trades but a master of the few precious means, yet this is what the church has always thought . . . It is enough, and more than enough, if a man just carries out the ancient duties of a pastor. Superfluous and even a hindrance is the officiousness of modern pastors. Here the slogan should be, “Not many, but much.” The poverty of our fathers is richer than the wealth of their opponents. It is through alternating periods of withdrawal and public appearance, stillness and publicity, through persistent use of Word and sacrament, through giving of a quiet but full measure, through modesty and steadfastness that the Lutheran church attains its goals.<sup>12</sup>

*The study of theology produces humility.*

The final reason to give yourself for reading high-octane theology is simply this: you need to be humbled. Depending on where you serve, you may be, in terms of mere credit-hours, the most educated person for miles. People even outside your membership may come to you with questions thinking you have the answers. Talk about an ego trip! No matter your setting, you need to be humbled. Look at the sheer volume of Luther’s writings. You will never amount to that, and that is a good thing to keep in mind. Gerhard had accomplished more by his early twenties than you or I ever will, even if we live long lives. And when you read these giants, you realize that you are not one of them. That is a good thing. Reading high-octane theology is humiliating, which reason alone should suffice for reading it.

As Gerhard says to would-be theologians at the end of his *Method of Theological Study*: “The greatest thing we know is the least of the things we do not.”<sup>13</sup> Or as Augustine reminds us in *De doctrina Christiana*: Whatever we have that is true belongs not to us but to Christ who is the Truth. The only thing that is truly our own is falsehood.

### Close

The reading of high-octane theology is (1) commanded by God, (2) service and worship to God in Spirit and truth, (3) necessary for good preaching and teaching,

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<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. and ed. James Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 165–166.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard, *On Interpreting Sacred Scripture and Method of Theological Study*, 241.

(4) a remedy for theological loneliness, (5) a reminder to humility and what Paul calls “complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

We need our pastors to be theologians now more than ever. Commenting on Titus 1:9 (“He must hold firm”) Luther writes:

This is the most important of all. The virtues are beautiful. A bishop is appointed in the midst of the nation (cf. Phil 2:15), but especially in the midst of heretics. If someone becomes a pastor, especially in a prominent place, and presents the Word, he will have them. Therefore he admonishes that a bishop be ready for both, that he have a trowel in one hand [and a weapon in the other], as in Nehemiah (Neh 4:17). There are not many such; many teach, but few fight. A certain tenacity is signified here, that is, that he not put the Bible aside, but that he give attention to reading, as the Epistle to Timothy says, adding: “Practice these duties” (1 Tim 4:13, 15). The reason he ought to be provided for by the church is that he ought to tend to reading and stay with it not only for others, but that he ought to meditate constantly *for himself*, that is, ought to immerse himself completely in Scripture. Such study will enable him to fight back. It is impossible for someone who reads Scripture studiously to meddle in worldly matters, but he should have the strength to be the kind of man Paul has described here. If he does not diligently study Holy Scripture, which he knows, the result will be a kind of rust, and a neglect of and contempt for the Word will arise. Even though you know Holy Scripture, nevertheless it must be read over and over again, because this Word has the power to stimulate you at all times<sup>14</sup>

Brethren, the winds of worldly doctrines are blowing hard. I serve on one of the most liberal college campuses in this country. I see what is coming down the pipeline. Now is not the time for softness in our thinking. Now is the time to fight, “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

I wanted to leave you with some profound reference from classical literature because I am a classicist, but alas, I could not get Tolkien out of my mind. There is a scene in *The Two Towers* in which he writes,

“It is hard to be sure of anything among so many marvels. The world is all grown strange . . . How shall a man judge what to do in such times?” “As he ever has judged,” said Aragorn. “Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on Titus” (1527), in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vol. 29, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76), 30–31 (emphasis mine).

Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house."<sup>15</sup>

You are becoming pastors in a world that "is all grown strange." How shall a pastor judge what to do in such times? Heed the wisdom of King Aragorn. Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear. "Guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim 1:14). Man your post. The scriptures are sufficient, and serious, high-octane study of them is not a waste of your time. To ignore such study is cowardice. Quit you like men; keep reading theology. S.D.G.!

Joshua Hayes

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<sup>15</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 427–428.