

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 85:2

April 2021

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Theological Observer

Christ Offers His Life through the Church's Pastors to a Confused World: An Introduction to the Seminary Curriculum

When Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), introduced its new Master of Divinity curriculum in 2005–2006, we had a number of reasons for the revisions that were made in the curriculum. Given the massive changes in our culture in recent decades, we wanted to offer a curriculum for pastors that sprang from the need for pastors who embody the message they proclaim and the sacraments they offer. We were intent on building a curriculum around these pastoral acts, connecting seminary studies more to the primary service in the church for which pastors are formed. In a world that increasingly has never known or has forgotten Christ, we were convinced Christ must be known deeply from the Scriptures, confessed clearly with lips, and also seen vividly in lives of mercy and love. Through the pastoral formation at the seminary, we wanted every future pastor to know what it means to be a baptized Christian who through preaching is led into communion with our Lord at his Table.

The Eternal Word

From the beginning, God speaks and acts for all goodness. All that he has made is good. He continuously bestows good gifts upon his creatures. He promises an eternal kingdom of blessedness and righteousness to those with whom he is reconciled. Yet from the beginning of his existence, man has pursued a false imagination of the good, doubting the goodness of God and setting up for himself alternative “goods,” if that were even possible.

In his persistent goodness, God does not abandon his creation, but continues to draw near with promises and actions of forgiveness and restoration. God's words were spoken first by his prophets, and his actions were recorded by them, in anticipation of the Lord himself coming to dwell among hostile men, to save them from their sins and to restore them to friendship and sonship. So God himself, in the person of his Son, entered into rebellious creation, taking on flesh and shining forth as the light of the salvation of man. By his death on the cross, he atones for the sin of the world; by his resurrection and ascension, he opens the way to eternal life for all men.

Christ's own apostles, his personally chosen ambassadors, proclaimed his work, continued his teaching, and recorded both in their writings. The writings of the prophets and apostles—the Holy Scriptures—remain the pure font of truth for salvation. These Scriptures are the unchanging source of teaching for Christians. To be Lutheran means to receive these Scriptures truthfully and seriously. As such, Lutherans confess the primacy, infallibility, and summary teaching of the Scriptures in the documents of the Book of Concord. For CTSFW, as a Lutheran seminary, the Scriptures remain the sole source and norm for teaching and church life, teaching and life which are confessed also in the Book of Concord. Submitting to this faith in the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ, CTSFW is a catholic and evangelical seminary—in the best sense of both words—holding forth this Word in the hope of the salvation of the world.

The Cultural Context

Enlivened by the timeless Word, today's pastors face the challenges of a volatile world that has turned away from God's constant promises and love. Many of these challenges would have been unthinkable even a generation ago. The breakdown of the family has coincided with the advent of postmodernism and a radical secularism. Truth is placed in quotation marks. Objective reality is thought to be unobtainable. In a deep sense, our people are at sea, unmoored from history and tradition, from family and community, and from the communal life of the church. In our cyber-age of friending and unfriending, blocking and following, we are becoming physically isolated from one another and, consequently, our own humanity.

Early modern and Enlightenment theories of individual identity have led to contemporary postmodernism's "authentic" self-actualization. Radical individual choice is regarded as the only way to actualize personal identity. Individual—often idiosyncratic and even bizarre—choice has become the axis around which personal identity revolves. Yet in the attempt to be authentic, "choice" becomes the master, an enslaving necessity that must be actualized for the sake of self-fulfillment, rather than serve true, good, and beautiful acts, which are the expression of a free mind.

From this perspective, the body as created by God is no longer definitive of our identity. The body and its parts are the incidental tools by which we seek to accomplish our inner desires and manifest our personality to the world. As such, we consider ourselves as radically autonomous individuals; yet each has become, in a way, his own sideshow. This public display of the self corresponds with personal isolation and fragmentation in the contemporary context. This peculiar dualism separates not only body from mind, but person from family, society, and even those chosen as friends.

We see this radical autonomy in the advent of so-called same-sex marriage and the gender revolution. A person is no longer he or she, but may be xe or zir, or even a plural singularity. This revolt against creation especially endangers the lives of the weak, the vulnerable, and the least among us. The autonomous individual is compelled to use not only his own body, but also the bodies of others for his self-fulfillment. Social interaction, therefore, has become a battle of individual wills, each seeking the power to persuade, manipulate, and control those around him to fulfill his own desires in the world.

Christian Identity in a Hostile World

This cultural landscape confronts the church with profound challenges that reach beyond intellectual pursuits and rational explanations of historic teachings. These challenges extend into the very heart of the human person and his bodily life in the world. In Iraq, Christians have been martyred for bearing the name of the Nazarene. On the Libyan shores, martyrs have been beheaded for saying, "I am a Christian." In our own land, Christians face persecution and slander. More than ever, we must be willing to bear the name of Christ the crucified by confessing, "I am not ashamed of Christ and his words." The church, therefore, must be ready to cultivate a Christian identity that can withstand a worldly hostility that is directed, not merely at the intellect, but at the very body of Christians and the geographical place of the church in this world. Rather than a merely psychological identity, the church must cultivate a genealogical identity that is generated from the Father, constituted through the crucified and risen flesh of Jesus, and bound together in the fellowship of the Spirit. In this baptismal identity, we call God Father and love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; in this eucharistic identity, we are bound to one another in the body of Christ, not merely by individual choice, but by the Holy Spirit.

Integration of Theological Disciplines

How do we form pastors for this challenging cultural context? Influenced by the academy, seminary curricula have traditionally been divided into the disciplines of Exegetical Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, and Pastoral or Practical Theology. These disciplines, while helpful, also gave the false impression that these are simply topics that can be divided and segmented into different spheres of knowledge. In order to counteract such thinking, we designed a curriculum in which these disciplines are more integrated, as they are in the life of the church. In order to accomplish this, teaching on Baptism, preaching, and the Lord's Supper is emphasized throughout the curriculum, and some integration of the disciplines is

included in every course. In addition, professors from each of the theological disciplines work together to teach the Theologia course series. In this way, we teach the basic pastoral acts holistically. We hoped to demonstrate and embody the mission of the seminary, which is to form pastors who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all. Such courses help future pastors understand their primary work as one that flows from Christ and his church, as witnessed by the apostolic Scriptures, with real and present life application in the forgiveness of sins and regeneration into life in Christ. This emphasis on integration can also be seen in our Psalms course, which takes into account not only insights of interpreting the text, but also the pastoral and practical use of the Psalter within the church today.

In a world that is fragmented, the church must reclaim her baptismal identity, as those freed from bondage to the devil, whose sins are forgiven, and who have been given a new life and a new family within the household of our true Father. Thus, we seek to form our students in a Christian identity grounded in Holy Baptism as that which incorporates them into the body of Christ and prepares them for Holy Communion. At this table, we are forgiven, drawn into the presence of God, and united to one another in the life of God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Divine Service and Serving One Another

The curriculum is designed to form leaders who recognize that this Christian identity, generated from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, has been handed over to them through many faithful Christians in the church throughout history. Servants of Christ are formed who love the creeds, theology, liturgy, and hymnody that have come to them as expressions of their familial identity in Christ, a sacred treasure handed down from their fathers in the faith. Accordingly, through classroom instruction, but more importantly through participation in the worship life of Kramer Chapel and local congregations, they will come to see the church's creeds and liturgies not as a chosen song or confession of one congregation, but as the family song of the one holy Christian and apostolic church. Like a shepherd, they will gently guide their flocks into the rich confessional, liturgical, and sacramental life that links them to the church of all times and places, and places upon their lips and in their ears the gospel message, in all its truth, clarity, and depth.

Part of the impetus for our curriculum was the understanding that theology is not simply a cerebral exercise, but that it is to be lived out in the congregation, community, and world. For this reason, we have a renewed focus on the central role that daily worship has in forming faithful pastors. Just as Kramer Chapel is the architectural focal point of this campus, so also daily worship is where the theology taught in the curriculum is fully integrated, delivered, and received. In addition to

this centerpiece of God serving us each day in worship, we also serve one another as students and faculty interact daily during coffee hour, meals in the dining hall, and various social gatherings. Professors serve not only as teachers in the classroom, but also as pastoral mentors for students in these settings. It is no accident that the dining hall and student commons are only a few steps from Kramer Chapel.

The Reading of Primary Sources

The other major building on our campus that is close to the chapel is our library, which underlines the need to be immersed in the great writings of the church. When we designed the curriculum, we also recognized that more than ever there is a need to concentrate on primary sources, so that our pastors are grounded in the things that matter. This means being immersed in the Scriptures as well as the church fathers, and becoming at home with the hymnal and catechism as sources of daily piety and devotion.

Our curriculum leads students back to these sources, especially to the biblical text in its original languages. In an age where the foundations of Christianity are challenged, our pastors must be able to defend and proclaim the faith as it is rooted in the scriptural narrative. The contemporary context demands that we proclaim the Scriptures as more than a quarry from which we mine intellectual truths. Rather, we seek a proclamation of the Scriptures as the genealogical narrative of our Christian identity. This proclamation recognizes that the church is attached to the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles like branches in the true vine. This means we proclaim the cross as the holy vine, in which we have been grafted, and Christ's body and blood as the healing fruit, from which we are generated and nourished. This also means we regard the apostles, prophets, saints, martyrs, and Lutheran reformers as familial witnesses whose testimony to the gospel of Christ we seek to imitate, whether in life or in death.

This begins with our courses on the four Gospels, where our students are immersed in the life and words of Christ himself. This Christ-centered emphasis carries into the Greek Readings courses, which understand Christ's life and words as the source of our identity, preaching, and teaching. Students take Greek Readings during their first two years in a small group of six students and one professor, studying the gospel reading for the upcoming Sunday. These classes are very practical because they integrate careful study of the Greek text of the Gospels with faithful interpretation and preaching. The small size of these classes encourages spiritual mentoring and prepares students to engage in the primary pastoral act of preaching. This focus on primary sources continues in the study of the Lutheran

Confessions as well as in the writings of Luther in order to form a clear Lutheran Christian identity in future pastors.

Public Witnesses Active in Mission

We have also recognized the need for our pastors to be public representatives of the faith, so we have emphasized the need for our students to be engaged, not simply as auditors, but as those who speak, present, and defend Christian teaching. This emphasis on verbal interaction and public speaking has become part of our curriculum design and course pedagogy. We prepare pastors who will speak faithfully from the pulpit, but also in the community and public square. We prepare deaconesses and church leaders who will embody the mercy of Christ, willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ and the least of his brethren. We intend that our students will engender in their people a willingness to bear the name of Christ in the midst of opposition, and even persecution. A goal of the curriculum, therefore, is to form living witnesses to Christ, who calls us to be both light and salt in a world that has grown dark.

This means that we are preparing pastors and deaconesses to be evangelical in the best sense of the term, namely, focused on the mission of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in every context. This is developed through many contextual ministry experiences: from assisting a pastor in a local Fort Wayne congregation, to hospital and care home experiences, to short-term immersion or summer-long experiences in urban, rural, or international missions, to yearlong internships and vicarages. These contextual learning experiences help form students to be public witnesses active in mission, both nationally and globally.

Conclusion

Learning from Christ the Good Physician as narrated in the four Gospels and considering the theology and practice of those who came before us, servants of Christ are being formed who will be caretakers of the soul. They are ready to contend against “the principalities, the powers, and the rulers of this present darkness” (Eph 6:12),¹ willing to bear the burdens of others, and able to bring balm and healing to those wounded by the world. Servants of Christ are formed who not only know the teachings of the Scriptures intellectually, but also are prepared to live holy lives wholly given to the service of Christ. We intend them to be true branches. At one end, they are branches rooted in the vine of Christ with a Christian identity generated out of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. At the other end, they are

¹ All Scripture quotations are the authors’ translation.

branches increasing, multiplying, and bearing the divine fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all the other fruits of the Spirit according to his gracious favor.

Adopted by the CTSFW Faculty (October 30, 2017)

Worship at CTSFW

When visitors step foot on our award-winning campus, we like to point out the obvious by saying that Kramer Chapel is the architectural focal point. It cannot be otherwise, with those sharply angled diamond bricks turned vertically, allowing the chapel, sitting there at the edge of the upper plaza, to dominate the skyline no matter where one stands on the campus.

When Concordia Theological Seminary moved from Springfield, Illinois, to Fort Wayne in 1976, the physical prominence of the chapel, coupled with its generous acoustic and magnificent organ, made it plain to Daniel Reuning, the Dean of the Chapel, that the seminary would have to “up” its game, so to speak. During its first year on campus, however, the seminary shared the chapel with the Senior College as its last class of seniors finished their degrees. Leadership of the daily service alternated between the two institutions. Musical forces were also shared; a mixed choir sang under the direction of Dean Reuning, while the men’s choir was led by Herbert Nuechterlein of the Senior College.

After the year of shared duties, the seminary assumed full responsibility of the chapel and of all its programs in the fall of 1977. To meet the burgeoning need, Richard Resch was brought on as a part-time Director of Chapel Music in order to assist Dean Reuning. The mixed choir evolved from presenting sacred music concerts, as had been the custom in Springfield, into several choral Vespers services each year. (Within several years, the seminary formed a second mixed choir.) For the Confessions Symposium in January 1978, a quartet of male voices was formed to sing during a choral Vespers. This group was expanded to eight singers the following fall and given the name Kantorei. Already in January 1979, the Kantorei made its first Epiphany tour. Eventually this choir would expand to twelve, and then sixteen, men.

Perhaps the most significant change that occurred at the time of the move from Springfield to Fort Wayne was the support that President Robert Preus gave to the Dean of Chapel to function as a true dean. Prior to the move, each day’s chapel service was typically chosen by the preacher assigned to that day. More often than not, the service followed a simple pattern of invocation, hymn, reading, sermon, prayer, and benediction. Not only were the traditional morning offices not prayed regularly, but each preacher’s selection of the hymn meant that there was no

consistent means by which future pastors could learn the church's song. With the president's support, the dean developed a regularly recurring pattern that utilized the major prayer offices. Through the intentional choice of hymns, the students were introduced to the great hymns of the Lutheran tradition. Very quickly, the place of daily chapel in the life of the seminary community grew in importance to match the physical presence of Kramer Chapel.

The continued maturation of the centrality of chapel life moved forward when Richard Resch was ordained and called as the seminary's kantor at the end of 1988 and then made a member of the faculty at the beginning of Dean Wenthe's tenure as president. In 2002, another milestone was reached when a second full-time kantor position was filled by Kevin Hildebrand—an unheard-of staffing of church musicians at a Lutheran seminary in North America, both then and now. This strong commitment for excellence was renewed a decade later at the time of Richard Resch's retirement by the calling of Matthew Machemer as the seminary's second kantor.

When the seminary curriculum underwent a significant revision in the early 2000s, the chapel and all that it represents figured prominently in that revision. Focused around the primary pastoral acts of preaching, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the curriculum recognized that the chief work of a pastor—the one called to deliver the Lord's gifts through his mandated means—is not only taught in the classroom but, just as significantly, modeled day after day in the chapel. In the past few years, the faculty has revisited the curriculum in order to make minor refinements. As part of that work, a conceptual statement concerning the curriculum was developed, which stated: "Just as Kramer Chapel is the architectural focal point of this campus, so also daily worship is where the theology taught in the curriculum is fully integrated, delivered, and received."¹

Since its publication in 2006, *Lutheran Service Book* has figured prominently in the seminary's worship life. A regular schedule of the prayer offices is utilized on a weekly basis, with a total of fifteen weekly services conducted during the regular academic year. Even as the students' life is nurtured and strengthened through the structured ordering of services, so are they given the opportunity to experience the fullness of the church's heritage in services and hymnody that our fathers and mothers in the faith have preserved and bequeathed to us.

Early in his career, J. S. Bach proposed to the city officials in Mühlhausen his plan for "well-regulated church music." Here in Kramer Chapel, that goal has been met, not only in regard to the music of the church, which is rich and varied in the

¹ See above, p. 174.

chapel's generous acoustic, but also in the seminary's liturgical life, as the gifts of God both nurture our students and form and shape them for service in the church.

Paul J. Grime

Paul on Same-Sex Relations in Romans

In a recent essay, William Loader, professor emeritus at Murdoch University in Western Australia, presents a compelling case that Paul was against same-sex relations, and on this account his article is well worth the read.¹ Philo, a Jewish near-contemporary of Paul, thought the same way, so Paul was not going out on a limb in his opposition to same-sex marriage (246). Loader gets to the heart of the matter in writing that same-sex marriage has to do with who God is. One cannot argue with this. He writes, "Assuming God created humans male and female, [Paul] finds the roots of such behavior in distorted minds and passions resulting from distorted understandings of God" (242). "Assuming" is the fly in the ointment. Probably speaking for the majority of mainline Protestants, Loader says people no longer see things the way Paul did, since "most of us no longer share Paul's starting point. We have come to believe something which Paul did not believe, namely that there really are gay people. If we see where Paul is coming from, namely that all people are either male or female, then Paul's arguments surely carry weight" (251). Paul assumes that all people are heterosexual, an assumption Loader says he and others cannot make. In not bending the biblical text to fit his predetermined agenda, Loader's exegetical authenticity is refreshing. Pastors with members struggling with this issue can benefit from Loader's biblical arguments. No reasons are given why we should see things differently from the way Paul did. According to Loader, we just do, and with this the flood gates are opened for all kinds of aberrant beliefs and practices, as he himself says has already been done. "The need to revisit assumptions of biblical writers is not new. We have done it in relation to matters such as divorce and women's leadership" (252). More than half a century ago, Heidelberg professor Peter Brunner, a confessional scholar of some note, said that the ordination of women would eventually lead to different understandings of God and church practices. We have lived to see his prophecy come true.

David P. Scaer

¹ William Loader, "Paul on Same-Sex Relations in Romans 1," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 74, no. 3 (2020): 242–252.