

CONTENTS

Volume Twenty-Two, Number Two

FEATURES

4 Formed in Christ by Primary Texts

By James G. Bushur

Due in part to the tragic wars among Christians following the Reformation, the Renaissance movement called “Humanism” began to take on a new character. These texts are a kind of Christian DNA that bears the genes of the Spirit producing sonship. Thus, these texts are not dead words or inert artifacts of a distant past; they are living seeds that penetrate the fleshly soil of our lives and generate abundant fruit.

7 Formed in Christ by Baptism, Preaching and the Lord’s Supper

By Paul J. Grime

Central to all of this instruction is the integration of the theological disciplines around the chief pastoral acts of baptizing, preaching and administering the Sacrament of the Altar. It is in and through these acts that God has promised to work His mighty deliverance, serving His people the gifts of life.

10 Formed in Christ for Public Service and Witness

By Peter J. Scaer

Our future pastors must become, more than ever, bold defenders of the faith. This will not be a watered-down Christianity or a church that wants to look like the world. We will be a church that recognizes the voice of the Good Shepherd, who says, “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

Also in this issue:

What Does This Mean?	p. 13
Called to Serve	p. 14
Seminary Announces Placements	p. 16
Faculty Focus	p. 18
Seminary Celebrates Completion of 172nd Academic Year	p. 20
Alumni	p. 25
Profiles in Giving	p. 28
Bible Study	p. 30



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Formed in Christ by Baptism, Preaching and the Lord's Supper

Dr. Paul J. Grime



The pastor stepped into the pulpit just as he had done hundreds of times, turning slightly sideways in order to slip through the narrow entrance. “Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father...” He had occasionally wondered whether that tight fit into the pulpit was the 1929 building committee’s subtle hint for the pastor to keep in shape “...and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” But here he was again, standing before his flock to bring them the Word of life; maybe not in the best shape of his life, but it would have to do. “Our text this morning is taken from the Gospel according to St. Mark...”



There are many things to teach these future servants, such as how to interpret the Scriptures, how to understand the Church's history, how to respond to modern cultural trends, and on and on. But central to all of this instruction is the integration of the theological disciplines around the chief pastoral acts of baptizing, preaching and administering the Sacrament of the Altar.

Sometimes he was tempted to wonder whether the people sitting in those well-worn pews ever listened to the words he spoke. Did they really believe that the preaching of God's Word was a life and death matter, where Satan was being unmasked and put to flight by God's all-powerful Word of pardon and peace? To his left the pastor could see Fritz, sitting in the seat he always occupied. He looked as pious as ever, yet everyone knew how difficult he could sometimes be. And there toward the back was Janice, a well-meaning person who, unfortunately, just couldn't resist making everyone else's business *her* business. Did it really matter what words the pastor uttered week after week? Was anyone listening?

Just then his eye took notice of Margaret, who was sitting in the center of the balcony from where she directed the handbell choir most Sundays. Hadn't he just recently sat with her in her living room as she recounted the last moments she had with her husband before his sudden death? And near the side exit sat Roger and Carissa, whose marriage had been on the brink of collapse before he had spent hours working with them. They appeared to be listening as he continued. Indeed, was he imagining it or did it seem as though they were hanging on his every word?

As he moved to the next section of his sermon and began talking about what it meant to belong to Christ, he couldn't help but gaze on the family sitting right in front of him. What a joyous day this was for them, for they had participated earlier in the service in the baptism of another child of God: Alexander Victor. How many times had he dipped his hand in that font and pronounced those words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," knowing that it was not his doing but God's, by which He joined another soul to Christ's death and resurrection and inaugurated them into a life of repentance and forgiveness. Even cantankerous Fritz understood that as he wrestled daily with his sins, desiring to live by Christ's forgiveness. And how many times had Janice felt compelled to apologize to her fellow parishioners when she realized that she was at fault?

Perhaps they were listening!

"The peace of God that passes all understanding..." He could hardly believe that he was already through the sermon. As always, these words of St. Paul were the perfect conclusion. God's peace is beyond our comprehension. And to think that in just a few minutes all these saints of God who had been listening to him would make their way to the altar to receive that very peace of God through the body and blood of Jesus. Yet again he was humbled by the thought that God had called him to serve these precious gifts to His holy people. Whether pouring the life-giving water of Holy Baptism or distributing the holy food by which God nourished His people or, as he had again this Sunday, standing before them speaking words of comfort and hope, in every case he recognized that it was by God's grace alone that he could serve the sheep of the Father's flock.

We at Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), Fort Wayne, also recognize the profound privilege that we have been given to "form servants in Jesus Christ who," as our mission statement says, "teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all." There are many things to teach these future servants, such as how to interpret the Scriptures, how to understand the Church's history, how to respond to modern cultural trends, and on and on. But central to all of this instruction is the integration of the theological disciplines around the chief pastoral acts of baptizing, preaching and administering the Sacrament of the Altar. It is in and through these acts that God has promised to work His mighty deliverance, serving His people the gifts of life. All of the pastor's ministry flows through these acts, whether he is visiting the sick, evangelizing the lost, calling lapsed members back to the Church's fellowship, or counseling those who are wearied by the changes and chances of life.

Our curriculum at CTSFW places a premium on the pastor's role as baptizer, preacher and presider at the Lord's Table. It is for this reason that we even have separate courses that integrate these three pastoral acts. But, even more significant, the students live out this integration as they gather daily in Kramer Chapel where they



themselves are recipients of God's gifts. Situated at the very center of the campus, Kramer Chapel serves as the focal point for the formation of our future pastors. And the same goes for our deaconess students, women who seek to embody the mercy of Christ as they serve the people of God, bringing hope and comfort. Daily our students hear the preaching of God's Word and weekly receive the bread and cup of salvation. Students are themselves immersed in the chapel life, serving as officiants, singing in a variety of choirs and joining their voices with that of the whole Church of God. That daily gathering brings both shape and focus to everything that we do in the classroom.

Ultimately, the formation of students at CTSFW is for the sake of the precious souls whom Christ has purchased with His blood, for every Fritz and Janice and Roger and Carissa. From our pulpits Christ is proclaimed with boldness, leading the baptized to the Lord's altar where they taste and see that the Lord is good. [▲](#)

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