

THE SPRINGFIELDER

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Editorial

Answer to Challenge

WE HAVE CELEBRATED the greatest event in the history of the world, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having once more followed His footsteps to Jerusalem and witnessed His unspeakable suffering on our behalf, we are confronted with the reason for our existence as a seminary. In all the welter of confusion concerning the purpose of the Church and its ministry, and in all the discussion concerning the relevance of the Church and its message, and in the questioning dilemma of the very existence of the living God, we are brought face to face with the reality that God did enter our history, did take on human flesh, and reveal Himself not only as the transcended Deity that created the world and continues to rule it, but also as the God who willed to become one of us, to enter into our existence, to bear our flesh, and to suffer our infirmities, and ultimately to experience the anguish of the greatest of all punishments, the death and penalty for sin itself. A seminary exists because Christ died and rose again. There is no other reason for our being here. There is no other message than the glorious eternal truth that, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." What a challenge to proclaim that message!

The Springfield seminary which has existed so long as an institution for the education of pastors for the Church is also facing an academic challenge. For the past decade we have worked diligently to revamp the curriculum, to raise admission standards, to upgrade the faculty, and to do all in our power to become a seminary which will educate men to serve twentieth century man in his anguish and his alienation. Recently, the first in a series of visitations by officials of the American Association of Theological Schools took place on our campus. Their purpose is to look at us from every angle and help us to become not only accredited (which is in itself a very small thing) but also to become a better agent for the preparation of ministers of the eternal gospel.

The Springfield seminary has an honored past, a dynamic and exciting present, and we genuinely believe a glorious future. More and more young men are enrolling from now over 140 different colleges and universities. The faculty is reaching the point where nearly one half of the members have received an earned doctor's degree. We are endeavoring in every possible way to be the kind of institution of which our Church can both be proud and in which she can have full confidence. The addition of a Professor of Missions to our staff is a step in this direction. We also will shortly be announcing the arrival of a full time Public Relations Director who will work particularly in the area of recruitment. Several other faculty members also shall be added in the near future. As part of broadening our program a number of students and faculty members,

together with several pastors of the Church, will be embarking immediately after Easter on our second Bible Lands Seminar. The group will visit various parts of the Middle East and the Mediterranean world in an effort to regain a picture of the milieu in which our Lord walked and in which His apostles answered the challenge of carrying the good news to a world in need.

When we look at the diversity and specialization of the modern world and all the problems which the Church must reexamine, we are staggered at the enormity of the problems we face—changes in parish life, ecumenical activities, materialistic and atheistic influences, the explosion in scientific and technological knowledge which exceeds our imagination, socio-economic changes, the population boom and the continued rise of nationalism. If our attention is centered on the problems, we will completely lose our perspective. Despair and discouragement will follow. But if we view these problems as challenges and opportunities for a Church which genuinely believes in its message and in the importance of this message for all mankind, then joy and enthusiasm must follow. This is our day of great opportunity for service to the Church. We genuinely hope that we can answer this challenge.

We bespeak your prayers and your continued support, and we pledge to you that we will strive to fulfill the challenge as we dedicate ourselves to the service of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord, and to the ministry of His ever-living and ever-struggling Church.

Dr. J.A.O. Preus
President

* * *

No Academic Sacred Cow

In his lead editorial, "Answer to Challenge," President Preus refers to our seminar's effort to achieve full accreditation in the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS). In this undertaking our school has received encouragement from practically all quarters. A few, however, have wondered whether this interest in accreditation might indicate an over-emphasis on "academics" or perhaps a trend toward doubtful "academic freedom." As far as AATS is concerned, its philosophy is simply that each school should be itself, its best possible self. And on the matter of academic freedom, AATS has produced a statement *par excellence*. *Christianity Today* (January 7, 1966, p. 31) refers to this excellent expression:

Some years ago the American Association of Theological Schools established guidelines for the practice of academic freedom. Their statement says that "Christian Freedom exists within the freedom of the Christian faith. Theological schools may acknowledge specific confessional adherence as laid down in the charters and constitutions of the schools with respect to their confessional loyalties both in the institutions and their individual members . . . So long as a teacher remains within

LOUIS H. BETO MEMORIAL LECTURE

A Charter for Contemporary Lutheranism

Some Assets and Liabilities in a Confessional
Tradition

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SEVERAL YEARS AGO I overheard a conversation in the lobby of the Oberlin Inn on the campus of historic Oberlin College in Ohio. An overnight guest, obviously a returning alumna, was complaining to the hostess about a bright, white, new music building designed by the architect Yamasaki. Her complaint, with drab old Oberlin buildings as background, was: "But the building does not fit into its environment." Came the steely reply, at once admonitory and promissory: "But it will."

The hostess, we may assume, was pointing to several features about the environment. For one thing, if the Yamasaki building is successful, no doubt the college administration will commission others somewhat like it. The effectiveness of a clear statement serves to initiate change in the environment. Second, if we may continue the act of mind-reading, we may suppose she meant that people's eyes will be trained to relate the new clear statement to the drab but comfortable old environment.

Something of this process is evident whenever a great new social force is intruded upon an environment. And insofar as religious movements are social forces, something like this occurs. When Christianity, to hurry to the point, appeared in the setting of Palestine and the Graeco-Roman world of the first centuries *Anno Domini* it did not "fit in" completely into the environment. As a clear statement, it initiated change in the environment; as time passed, people

came to see what it was about and they fit it in to the environment. A result was the establishment, in the fourth century, of imperial Constantinian Christendom which, based in part on St. Augustine's charter,¹ prevailed for well over a thousand years.

One of the hazards to a religious group in the act of prevailing is that it can become the drab, old environment. That this occurred to Christianity in some parts of the world was clear from the rise and dramatic movement of Islam as a new element over Christian soil. Within Christendom a dramatic, clear statement was made four and one half centuries ago at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The Gospel as preached by Luther and his compatriots in the social movement which grew as an effect of and in support of this preaching did not fit in to the environment of Western Europe. "It will," a prophet of 1517 could have proposed. It did, and transformed the environment of northwest Europe and as people learned to see what it was about.²

Lutherandom, imperial Lutheran evangelicalism, made all territorial gains in the early decades after the first clear statement; it settled for space in Germany, Scandinavia, and parts of Central and Eastern Europe. There it transformed the environment; beyond that area it has never been more than a guest in Reformed Catholic, or secular "host" cultures where it either takes over or adapts to their forms or where it stands a chance of making its point by not wholly "fitting in" to an environment.

The dialectic of fitting/not-fitting, of transforming/speaking-to a culture is a subtle one.³ If a religious movement too readily fits in and too easily transforms, without doubt it has lost something of its sense of custodianship for the Law of God which stands in judgment on men in culture, even if they call their artifact Christendom or— to revert to my coinage for a reality—Lutherandom. If it fails entirely to address men in culture, if it fails even to evoke curiosity or to make itself seen or heard, without doubt it has lost something of its sense of ambassadorship for the Gospel of Christ which addresses man in understandable terms.

Men who are responsible in any age for the Christian witness and, in our case, the Lutheran share in that witness, are involved in the subtlety of that dialectic. By some we are told that the Christian Gospel must be made "plausible" and natural, so that it can easily be fit in to the expectations of men.⁴ But if plausibility is the chief characteristic of the faith, where is the offense or scandal of the Cross; if the faith is natural, why is the Cross necessary, since men could jolly-well have taken care of matters on their own? On the other hand, if pride in custodianship of the scandal is transformed into prideful assertion of the paradoxicality and absurdity of the Cross then is there not a danger that what is simple and direct and natural about Christ's address to man be lost in gibberish, hidden in a sealed arcanum?

A madman may rush down the hall, shouting the true words of the Gospel proclamation in a foreign tongue: he is not addressing

us, the context of the 'implausible' Gospel is not plausible. The Broadway street preacher may be echoing the apostolic preaching from the Book of Acts, but he is not meeting us in our need. And the Christian who has no care at all for the environment, the hopes and fears, the forms and the languages in which he moves and which he speaks, is not serving as did his forefathers in those epochs when fresh, clear statements were made. "Nothing is so incredible as an answer to an unasked question."⁵ With all this in mind, I should like to comment on several features of the witness of Lutheranism which can address questions which are being asked today; in a sense this paper is an attempt to see contemporary significance in historic themes symbolized by Karl Holl's title: *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*. No one can hope to *cover* such a subject; were I a parish pastor once again, no doubt I would stress different aspects of the question than those approached here. My words will naturally reflect the concerns of a Lutheran who spends most of his vocational hours in an environment which, insofar as it is Christian, is ecumenical but which, since it is usually in the context of the modern university, is secular.

Compare these words then to those of a missionary who brings in "reports from the field." Such reports are prepared for exposure to the "home forces" for testing and in the hope that they will cause "home" to think, and also that "home" will have something to send along with the missionary. Now more than ever such contact between people in boundary situations and in the training centers are necessary. Certainly the cultural changes which will make up the context in which the Church works are epochal and fundamental. In a phrase which one hears with increasing frequency, "Everything is up for grabs." People who share our environment now are passing through a profound religious cultural crisis. Maybe it began with Renaissance and Reformation; certainly it was heightened in the individualism of the Pietist and Enlightened eras; the mid-nineteenth century schism in Western culture, when nationalism or socialism or industrialism produced the 'real' religions of the modern world, accelerated the process of change.⁶ In any case, today a sense of theological treading of water, of groping and grasping is once again manifest. In such a time of perplexity or confusion, apathy is a great temptation; let the drab, old environment remain drab and old, some counsel. Let the Gospel be preached in an ever more implausible context, in ever more incredible and maldirected terms; despise the men who are unconcerned because other cultural concerns have drawn them away.

Another set advises us that new situations demand new gospels, new religions: we must invent and fashion from scratch, as it were, a good news which is immediately plausible and credible and attractive to men in the industrialized, secularized world. We must grasp for a Gospel out of thin air, or draw our norms from the secular world which already has the answers! Or we may take a third course, one which comes most naturally to an historian: we can look into

our history, examine our tradition, appraise our assets and liabilities. We can ask what elements in that tradition might be seen in new light in a new environment, might serve as fresh, clear elements. No matter which positive course one follows, he is called to do it in the spirit suggested by Pope Pius XI—a rather meek man, by the way: “Let us thank God that He makes us live and deal with the present problems . . . It is no longer permitted to anyone to be mediocre.”

†

The fundamental problems surrounding a Lutheran witness today are two-fold in character: structural and substantial. Structurally, Lutheranism seems to be mislocated, malformed, and disorganized to address the culture. If it is true, as Alfred N. Whitehead remarked a long time ago, that the Reformation was a family quarrel among northwest European peoples, little has happened to bring about change. Except for its spread to America where it did not shape the culture, and except for a few missionary outposts, it remains a predominating religious influence chiefly in cultures where religion is in no way any longer a predominating influence.⁷ It shares with all of Western Christianity its too-safe identification in the West; it shares with Northern Christianity a too-close identification with the North. It seems to want to make its witness through institutions which are organized with a very low scale of efficiency for carrying on mission in and service to a world market. Witnessed by United Nations and Great Societies, by mass media of communication and political power elites. In this paper I shall have nothing much to say about these problems of location and form, having regularly addressed myself to them elsewhere. Now let us concentrate chiefly on the substantial issues: what do we have to say and to do where we are located and formed to gain a hearing, to make our way evangelically and culturally?

The problem can be stated quite simply: neither the *form* nor the *material* principles constitutive of Lutheran Christianity seem to be at stake *culturally* today. Pastorally, they remain issues. They are intra-ecclesiastical concerns. But how churchmen make up their mind about them has little direct cultural significance at once, historians can argue, they did. When the Bible was the charter for civil society or a business ethic, how men cared for it and interpreted it made a direct difference; when a continent fought over the meaning of grace, how men resolved the issues mattered on battlefields and in courts as well as in homes and hearts. Today, how men decide about the authority of Scripture or the meaning of forgiveness is an issue of importance inside the church, where a minority of the people show some signs of caring, at least. The result of the debates do not, in the twentieth century, directly inconvenience or inconvenience the people around the churches.

One can, of course, point to exceptions. The question of Biblical authority is a focally cultural issue, for example in the American

South where public issues on racial integration are debated on the basis of scriptural proof-texts. In that instance a residual "Bible-belt" zone of interaction between church and state makes such an issue possible. Or, on the subject of grace, the study of religious guilt can be at the basis of cultural studies of anxiety, neuroses, and social behavior—though theologians experience considerable difficulty getting the question to be seen and phrased along the lines of Christian teaching on justification!

Even pastoral ministers experience difficulty with using "the doctrine of grace" as an entree to the people they would serve. They have thrilled to the possibilities of counselling the few in their parishes who are neurotically anxious, particularly sensitive emotionally, or existentially aware of guilt. But most of their holy Communion sermons are devoted to the problem of guilt and forgiveness when one does not *feel* guilty or forgiven: this is a circumstance we hardly picture in certain 'religious' ages of the past.⁸ Most often the minister has to deal with people in whom some marks of Christian discipleship are evident, but people who are affluent, comfortable, antiseptic, leisured, insulated, not regularly capable of phrasing the life and death questions in the forms their forefathers did. Often to them the language of authority or the language of sin and grace sounds like a set of formulas and slogans, beloved because they are so familiar but hardly ever sounding like judgment or Gospel, good news.

"Don't try to be saved by your efforts, your penances, your works" shouts the preacher. And the visitor looks around and asks, "Who's trying?" If Luther were to return to 'Christendom' in the nineteenth century, says Kierkegaard, he would have to say almost the opposite of what he had had to say in the sixteenth about grace, because people hardly needed words of assurance: they were already complacent. "Cheap grace" Bonhoeffer called it. And Merton Strommen and his associates,⁹ as well as anyone else who has interviewed people closest to our pulpits, come to the conclusion that the decisive and central teachings of Lutheran confessional life are obscured, seldom grasped, barely comprehensible, nurtured only nominally. Is this central teaching then what Tillich called only a 'dead symbol',¹⁰ killed because people ask other questions, dead because it cannot be made important or attractive? Does one stop preaching because his contemporaries mistranslate his questions in a given culture? (Here we must avoid romanticizing past cultures: we are not sure that the contemporaries of David or Paul or Luther or Wesley were all *that* sin-sick, grace hungry. But we can profit from attempts to delineate what was different about their contexts and our own).

Perhaps we can begin to recover ministry if we seek to locate the problem of our witness. It is possible to see in the history of at least the Western churches a certain set of obsessive images, pre-occupying doctrines, inevitable agendas of an almost epochal character. The early centuries were peopled with men who were busy

defining Christology: this is the permanent achievement of the creative making period. The medieval and Reformation churches were preoccupied with the doctrine of man and of grace: Luther did not ask "How can I find God" (as John Osborne's *Luther* seems to imply that he did). Luther asked, "How can I find a gracious God?" What happens then in our epoch, when people drop the adjective and talk only of "The Problem of God"? What happens when Christ as 'object' of theological language tends to dissolve under examination, when men go about their business practically the same way whether or not God exists? When this is true, it is necessary on a culture-wide basis and to the extent that one is given the platform and the means to address them with comment on their priority issue "The Problem of God."¹¹ This is what theologians have been doing in our time; some of them postponed it in the days of neo-orthodoxy or neo-liberalism or neo-evangelicalism. But they are, albeit clumsily—this is a new way of facing a basic Christian problem!—facing it now.

'Metaphysical' atheism is having a round in philosophical circles; the world of the arts and the academies do not 'need' God or know what to do about images of God or 'God-talk'; the moderate state does not commit its citizens to a particular reference to the supernatural order as states did in the past. Most of all, people in an industrial and technological or scientific order adopt characteristic modes of thought and action in which 'God' plays no part: how can we 'work the topic around' so that gracious-God is talked about? Here we can learn from Jesus Christ, who is portrayed to us as one who addressed people where they were, the sin-sick where they were, the complacent where they were, the seekers where they were, the practically godless where they were.¹² Perhaps if we begin in this fashion we shall be able to reach into the center of our treasure and the Gospel of grace.

The substantial question here, then, is this: are there other resources in Lutheran modes of witness and language to meet these other questions? Are these congruent with the Gospel which we confess to be the Word which addresses us, the gift regularly given to us? Answers to this question preoccupy the systematic theologians in Lutheran and other evangelical centers; here I propose to suggest four clues out of the Lutheran past which may have a bearing on the way the questions are put today. It would be foolish to claim too much for them. They are methodological tools, linguistic signposts, heuristic devices, and often nothing more. But they do suggest that the Lutheran Reformation implied a broader theological scope than it is sometimes given credit for, that Lutherans need not be wholly silent in the face of today's theological questions, and that the distinctiveness of these symbols and phrases lies in the fact that they are demonstrably corollaries of the "doctrine of the Gospel"; they are not autonomous, loose-ended *loci* of doctrine left lying around after the neat systematic batch gets put together. They are

clues to parts of the message which did not need exploring so much in the sixteenth century as they do today.

I. *The Problem of God and the 'visibilia et posteriora Dei'.*

In an obsessively empirical age, in a time when verification is a practical concern, the "problem of God" is acute because those who use language of God cannot 'demonstrate' the 'object' to which it refers. If such a statement sounds philosophically precious, put it practically: we have before us a perplexing but apparently unperplexed being, the godless man; but we have only been trained to reckon with god-fearing (but sinful) man.¹³ Today people ask not "Is God gracious?" but rather, "Is God?" Or, more frequently, they shrug shoulders and do not make much of either question at all. Only when they are reflective and serious about theology they do raise God's is-ness and activity as a prior concern and, until it is addressed, they will make nothing of God's graciousness.

In such a situation it is important for the Christian to try to perform no sleight-of-hand, as if his use of language and his philosophical analysis will somehow 'produce' God, like an object to be wheeled out on stage. He is going, in the end, not to argue but to clarify and to witness: he will make clear what he is talking about when he announces God as a presence turned toward man, gracious in Christ, energetic in Word and Sacrament. In such a time I believe he has an advantage over those in the speculative theological traditions. Where witness seemed to depend somehow on a reasoned metaphysic, on a thoughtout proof against the background of a cosmic screen marked supernatural, the witnessed-to (or argued against) person could be suspicious. Has the apologist access to realms of being that I cannot know or test? The Lutheran never has had such access, and could never legitimately claim it.

Luther staked a corral around the kind of inquiry in which he wanted theologians to indulge, and it was purely empirical: it talked about God in the middle of the world, in the midst of community, manifest in Christ. If one wanted to talk about the heavenly majesty, he had to do this only by witness to the earthly presence. The Heidelberg debate set forth the consistent norm: "*Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui 'invisibilia' Dei 'per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit', Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit.*"¹⁴ Only he has the right to be called a theologian who is content with a knowledge of the "hind parts" of God. This was the heart of the theology of the cross in contrast to the speculative philosophers' theology of glory.

Those who work with the theology of the cross have long had experiencing wrestling with the problem of "the hidden God"—less dramatic a metaphor for the human situation of aloneness than "the death of God", but one more appropriate because of its modesty, because men can speak of it with clarity.

Why should we advertise "the theology of the cross" as an asset in the Lutheran tradition? Obviously, it is no cure-all to problems

in philosophical theology. It does not produce God. But it does help the theologian keep his feet on the ground and gain the confidence of the people with whom he deals. The tools of empirical research are his: Luther's "grammar applied to the Scriptures"; careful historical inquiry into the Christian experience of believers in community;¹⁵ an examination of a tradition; an exposition of a dogmatic theology; pastoral care based not on speculation about the existence and mind of God but on the "visible" wounds of Christ.¹⁶ If Lutheran Christians make clear that they have always done theology this way, that they have no other advertisements or expectations, that they aspire to nothing else, then at least the person to whom they would communicate need not fear that at a later stage in the conversation by some sleight-of-hand a trick will be pulled on him, a special appeal to a higher speculative wisdom will be made.

For Lutherans, God-talk and the problem of God are always approached first through Christ-talk and reference to His witness to the Father. But in a past day when Lutherans could trade on a folklore which was almost superstitiously open to the supernatural and the transcendent, the move from language about Christ to language about God was easier to formulate. The new cultural context is what has imposed the controversial hermeneutical questions on the Church today.¹⁷ I certainly have not a vision of the outcome of the controversy and do not know its last word, but its first words if they wish to qualify as Lutheran theology have to deal with the empirical, the traces and tracks of God in history, with the visible and hind parts of God.

II. *The Problem of Nature and the Formula Finitum Capax Infiniti.*

It has often been remarked that in an epoch like ours, obsessed as it is with man's creation, with science and technology, witness to the meaning of the doctrine of creation has become newly urgent. And Lutherans are accustomed to hearing that their confessions have not formulated a systematic doctrine of creation.¹⁸ We are told that a soteriological anthropomorphism, a putting of all eggs into one basket, a single-minded focus on the Second Article and on man's need has deprived us of a word to say about the importance of the created order.¹⁹

Here again a brief formula which is nothing more than a formula has distinguished Lutheran thought. Again, application of such a methodological tool can be no more than a first word, but this first word does indicate the importance with which the Lutheran Christian regards the created order around him. In the debates over the Lord's Supper and elsewhere the Lutherans countered the Reformed parties' position with the assertion that the finite is capable of bearing or manifesting the infinite, *finitum capax infiniti*. The word 'infinite' is problematic for those who wish to use words with care. Perhaps today we need to translate these symbols. But they point us to a consistent element in our confessional tradition.

Here, here, in the midst of our world, where Word is spoken, the bread and wine of our (or, better, His) table, here whatever is manifest of God is manifest! If this is so, then this order which we inhabit for a few years takes on dimensions of new importance. At Christmas we sing in a Lutheran chorale of praise to God "who our race hath honored thus that he deigns to dwell with us": what better way to put the meaning of incarnation in this tradition?

When Luther faced Zwingli at Marburg, two views of our 'finite' order were countering each other.²⁰ Luther, critics tell us, represented medieval man for whom the visible (sacramental) world was immediately transparent to 'the beyond', the transcendent order. Zwingli was there representing modern man, for whom the visible was opaque, impermeable. Man through his spirituality had to contrive a relation to 'the infinite' and the adjective 'mere' was fatally attached to the word 'symbol'. Today when other Christians are working to remove that adjective from the word symbol, Lutherans must take special pains not to attach it, to denigrate the revelatory importance of the world of words and works where Christ is present as Word. Again, this is nothing more than a first word on doctrine of creation, but it provides a charter for those which follow and is consistent with central Lutheran teachings on the Gospel of forgiveness.

III. *The Problem of History and the Larvae Dei.*

The problem of history is a corollary of the problem of nature, and little additional can be said here. When Luther spoke about the activities of men as "masks" or "veils" (*larvae Dei*) of God he revealed how seriously he took the world of affairs. In this light the alien prince took on Christian significance, the enemy might be an agent of God, the simple housewife was his servant. This part of Lutheran witness is a permanent protection against angelism or triumphalism. It charters people in the world who do not wait for perfection before they make use of the world for Christian purpose. As Luther said, God rides the crippled horse and carves the rotten wood. Lutheran quietism and non-involvement in political and social life, or apathy in vocation are all judged by this word from within the tradition. History matters. When we worship, speak, and act in Christ's name, something happens: it does not not happen. History matters.

IV. *The Problem of Society and Iustitia Civilis.*

Our fourth clue to a Lutheran charter in the contemporary world is an enlargement of a hint, an expansion of a small point, in Lutheran talk about both justification and socio-political talk. In America Lutherans have escaped the charge no less than in Europe that they are instinctively passive and necessarily impotent in the political order. Unquestionably the record reveals plenty of reasons why this charge should be made. More important for this paper, there is in part of Luther's and the confessions' theological witness

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IV. *The Problem of Society and Iustitia Civilis.*

Our fourth clue to a Lutheran charter in the contemporary world is an enlargement of a hint, an expansion of a small point, in Lutheran talk about both justification and socio-political talk. In America Lutherans have escaped the charge no less than in Europe that they are instinctively passive and necessarily impotent in the political order. Unquestionably the record reveals plenty of reasons why this charge should be made. More important for this paper, there is in part of Luther's and the confessions' theological witness

a problem which does give some occasion to those who would be passive and disengaged. Clearly, the whole world of man, this theatre of God's activity, when it is turned in upon itself bears the demonic: it is entirely in need. Some Lutherans have used this word to speak in either terms of despair or perfectionism: they will wait for the coming Kingdom or they will wait until everyone on earth is converted to Christ and *then* they will honor the civil or political struggle!

Such an attitude is certainly a misreading of all that Lutheranism has to say. I am impressed that Lutheran theology, whether it foresaw the secular state or not, charters the Christian to live and serve in it in a unique way. Reformed theology, so often more successful at calling the Church to be the Church in the world of the political, has regularly manifested theocratic tendencies. American Protestant culture in its strengths and weaknesses bear testimony to the Reformed impulse to want to "run the show" in the earthly city.

In Lutheran teaching on civil righteousness there is a first word about the importance of the secular state and the secular order, about the man who serves God whether he knows it or not, whether he acknowledges Christ's Lordship or not.²² Certainly the man apart from Christ does not know "the righteousness which is accounted or availing before God." *In loco justificationis*, when man is being regarded in the act of being justified, God's Law always and only accuses. But in other contexts it is a power of God for the good of the human community, for the care of the neighbor.²³ And the man who serves the neighbor, who brings order and peace and care, is an agent and exemplar of *justitia civilis*, a civil righteousness which matters very much in the human community.

Each of these Lutheran assets brings with it a liability; here one can see the dangers that such a simple charter for secular man may lead to a charter for autonomous secularity; isolation of the passage in Romans 13 on civil obedience has often led Lutherans to the point where they bring not even a word of Judgment against authority when it turns demonic. But such practice may depend on bad exegesis, extraneous and accidental factors, or lazy Lutheranism: it is not intrinsic to the case.

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Certainly these four clues to a charter do not exhaust the possibilities. They illustrate the point that Lutheranism has possibilities in witnessing to the First and Third Article of the Creed, just as it knows its strengths with the Second Article. The clues I have mentioned (except the fourth one) have been intentionally sub- or para-confessional. They are motifs or formulas which occur rarely if at all in the Confessional endeavors, which appear implicitly but hardly explicitly. I leave to dogmatic and confessional experts the task of expounding the Confessions. But as an historian I think

it is legitimate to point to motifs or methodological hints from Luther and early Lutheranism as lines for further inquiry.

Should we speak meaningfully today on the problems of God, nature, history and society—the culturally posed problems—what will happen? Will we prevail? We do not deal in futures; in any case, we have not been promised that we shall prevail. We have been given only a mandate to be faithful. But we may have confidence from a reading of history that if the Church does address people where they are it can not only reshape culture but can gain a hearing in a plausible context for the message which always offends just as it always has the potential of making men rejoice, of making hearts glad. The fools for Christ who changed their environment and gladdened hearts back when there were kings reached into a long history for a word to give them confidence for their task. The kings and princes are gone, but the powers remain. And so the word which prefaces the Augsburg Confession is *a propos* (Psalm 119:46): “I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings, and shall not be put to shame.”

Footnotes and Bibliographical References

1. St. Augustine's role in shaping Christendom is recounted in John O'Meara, *Charter of Christendom: The Significance of the City of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1961). This book also provided the title for the present essay. See especially Chapter I.1: “The Relevant Historical Situation.”
2. The classic statement on the environmental changes worked by the Reformation was Karl Holl's *Die Kulturbedeutung der Reformation in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, Vol. I* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948) which has been translated as *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation* (New York: Meridan, 1959). For Luther, according to Holl, “the aim is not to supersede the secular order, but rather to ennoble it and convert its original harshness into something humane.” (p. 28). Taking its cue from Holl, my paper could have been called “The Potential Cultural Significance of the Reformation.” In our time, Wilhelm Pauck has devoted himself particularly to the task of assessing the cultural and environmental effects of the Reformation; some of his papers have been collected in *The Heritage of the Reformation* (Glencoc, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961). The literature on this subject is enormous; Holl and Pauck will serve as introductions.
3. So subtle, in fact, that some of the more careful analysts who work with typologies often fail to do justice to the detail of history. In American academic circles the most accepted picture of the relationships of Christianity to the environment in recent years has been derived from H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951). Niebuhr sees Calvin chiefly as an exemplar of the motif “Christ Transforming Culture” and Luther of “Christ and Culture in Paradox.” This is true so long as one relies on the political illustration; however, if Calvin's and Luther's attitudes toward the arts would be examined, Niebuhr's categories would have to be reversed. Luther was ready to see how “Christ transformed culture” in music but was suspicious of the political realm; Calvin, *vice versa*.
4. A recent essay on ‘plausibility’ is James A. Pike's *A Time for Christian Candor* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). The Bishop elevates

'plausibility' to position as the chief apologetic category but confuses contextual plausibility (which seems to me to be essential in apology and congruent with apostleship) to substantial plausibility (which contradicts the paradoxical and scandalous character of the cross of Jesus Christ). Bishop Pike promises to deal with methodological plausibility (p. 11) and soon finds himself speaking substantially, of the "plausibility of the basic elements of the Christian Faith." (p. 19). I do not agree with the tradition which accents the absurdity of the Gospel, the tradition from Tertullian through Kierkegaard to modern existentialism: It is difficult enough to be a Christian without having to carry the burden of 'absurdity'; the Christian's only interest should be in the telling of the story through means appropriate to it. Where it offends, let it; where it addresses man as he is, let it.

5. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, II* (New York: Scribner's, 1943), p. 6.
6. For background literature on this subject see Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 1964); Peter F. Drucker, *Landmarks of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Meaning of the 20th Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).
7. Gerhard Szczesny, *The Future of Unbelief* (New York: Braziller, 1961), is a report on secularization in Europe.
8. Paul Tillich made a life-long though never wholly successful attempt to translate the Reformation's concerns for 'justification by faith' to the modern world's attempts to deal with meaningless and the Christian answer in 'the new being' in Christ; similarly, he attempted (with more success, I would argue) to extend the Reformation's language of justification (of man in his moral fault, his sin) to the area of man's intellectual contradictions and doubt. See his brief but important books devoted to these two subjects, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale, 1952) and *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).
9. Merton Strommen, *Profiles of Church Youth* (St. Louis, Concordia, 1963). On 'justification by faith' as it is apprehended by Lutheran young people, see pages 56f., 59f., 228f., 243, 280-84, 29f., 342-46.
10. D. Mackenzie Brown, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 147ff.
11. Bibliographical references on "The Problem of God" will be found throughout my *Varieties of Unbelief* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).
12. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 156f., 166f. for Biblical instances and for Bonhoeffer's argument on this point.
13. John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven; Yale, 1964), p. 84 is a Roman Catholic discussion of the new phenomenon, the modern godless man.
14. "The one who beholds what is invisible of God, through the perception of what is made, is not rightly called a theologian. But rather the one who perceives what is visible of God, God's 'backside' (Exodus 33:23), by beholding the sufferings and the cross." Translated by Karlfried Froehlich for John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 500-503. See B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (New York: Oxford, 1962).
15. A book-length introduction to this subject is John Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale, 1963).

16. Recall the decisive counsel given Luther by Staupitz, as retold in Heinrich Boehmer, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation* (New York: Meridan, 1957), p. 103.
17. Recent statements on these hermeneutical problems can be found in Essays XI, XII, XIII in Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963).
18. See Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), Chapter 2 and especially p. 37, "In recent years the criticism has often been voiced that the doctrine of creation has not been clearly and unambiguously explained in the Lutheran Confessions. It is, indeed, noteworthy that there is not even a specific article on creation except in the Catechisms . . ."
19. See Erich Przywara, *Das Katholische Kirchen Prinzip (Zwischen der Zeiten*, July 1929, 277-302) and his *Ringeln der Gegenwart* (Augsburg, 1929), II, 543-78.
20. Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind* (New York: Meridan, 1959), p. 211f., provides a cultural context for the debate between Luther and Zwingli.
21. See the chapter on 'The Creatures as 'veils' of God' in Philip S. Watson, *Let God be God* (London: Epworth, 1947), pp. 76ff. for extensive references on 'larvae dei'.
22. For an introduction to the confessional literature on civil righteousness see the summary by Edmund Schlink, *op. cit.*, pp. 226 ff.
23. This is an often overlooked and too seldom debated feature of Lutheran teaching; it was exposed in an all too brief and superficial way in Gustaf Aulen, *Church, Law and Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1948), pp. 59, 69, 72. The whole book develops other features of this point.