

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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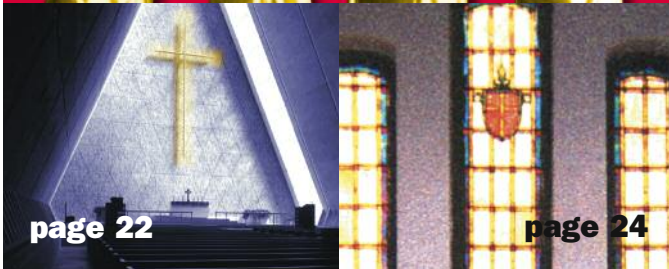
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Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe

PUBLISHER
Rev. Scott Klemsz

EDITOR
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ASSISTANT EDITOR
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ART DIRECTOR
Steve Blakey

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Most of the artwork pictured in this issue hang in classrooms, in hallways, and in Kramer Chapel on the CTS campus.

Thus Says

By the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Gieschen

Most higher educational institutions focus on the words and deeds of mankind. They expose students to an immense amount of human knowledge that spans several centuries of time, is from far-flung parts of the globe, fills millions of books, and is taught by professors who often take pride in their own intellect. The primary focus of pastoral formation at Concordia Theological Seminary, however, is the words and deeds of God. Students are immersed in a limited amount of divine revelation that spans a few centuries, is from a small part of the globe, fills sixty-six scrolls that are now bound as one book, and is taught by pastors who passionately impart the wisdom of God. Holy Scripture is the foundation for forming future pastors, because in it we have the words and deeds of God—stretching from His creation, to His promise after the fall, to His faithfulness to Israel, to His climactic revelation in the crucified and risen Christ—recorded by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. With our Lutheran forefathers, “we believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged” (*The Formula of Concord*). Therefore, the pastors who teach here have been formed by Holy Scripture in order that, like faithful prophets of old, the words and deeds of the one true God are ever in their minds and on their lips: “Thus says the Lord.”



This theological education founded upon Holy Scripture begins long before students come to this campus. The most profound learning about God first took place for many of them and most of us when we were mere babes who felt the splash of water and heard the powerful words given by Jesus Christ: “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” In Holy Baptism, God called us out of the ignorant rebellion of our sin that was leading us to eternal damnation and gave us faith that receives forgiveness. At the font, we learned much about the one true God as the Spirit breathed His life into our sinful corpse and joined us with Christ, whose righteousness became ours as the Father adopted us as His own sons. The theological education that follows, as we hear and read other words of Holy Scripture and taste the visible Word of the Sacrament of the Altar, is nothing more and nothing less than an unwrapping of God and new life gifted to us in Holy Baptism. Through these means, the Holy Spirit teaches us that the “foolishness of God,” especially the scandal of the cross, is wiser than the “wisdom of men” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

the Lord

The Study of Holy Scripture

These means continue to pierce through the lingering fog of our sinful nature, leading us back again and again to the gracious waters of our Baptism where our eyes were first fixed on Jesus as “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

The seminary continues this theological education by immersing students further into Holy Scripture. Although all seminary classes draw on the Bible in some manner, the courses that consist primarily of the study of the biblical text make up *Exegetical Theology*, one of the four principal curriculum areas. Exegetical Theology focuses on the *exegesis*, the “explanation” or interpretation, of Holy Scripture on the basis of the languages in which it was originally recorded: Hebrew/Aramaic (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). The study of these languages is difficult for some, yet it always rewards those who persevere. We come to realize that English translations sometimes fail to express, or falsely express, nuances of the Hebrew or Greek text. If pastors are to stand before people and use Holy Scripture to declare “thus says the Lord,” it is vital that they read and relate faithfully the words that the Spirit caused to be written. Martin Luther recognized this and urged the study of Scripture in its original languages: “We shall have a hard time preserving the Gospel without the languages; they are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained.”

In addition to studying Holy Scripture in its original languages, a second accent of exegetical theology is the broadening of biblical knowledge while maintaining a respect for the Bible as God’s inerrant Word. Seminary students have the luxury of time and resources, unlike they ever had or will have again, for dedicated study of the historical background and content of Holy Scripture. Students examine the cultural, social, political, literary, and religious history of the lands and people found in the Bible. This broad biblical knowledge is a great help in interpreting specific biblical texts. In this process, students are also exposed to the dangers of some modern scholarship that discredits the historical trustworthiness of the Bible. Although human reason certainly must be used in exegetical theology, it is always reason in service to understanding God’s Word and held captive by faith, rather than reason reigning in judgment over God’s Word and ruining faith. As Martin Franzmann has stated, the humble posture of the interpreter is that of “the obedient hearer and the overawed beholder.”

A third, and by far the most important, accent of exegetical theology at the seminary is faithful interpretation of Scripture that is centered on Christ. A person can have a vast knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible and still not interpret it properly and profitably if his exegesis does not speak forth Christ and the salvation that Jesus has won for the world. The risen Christ recognized this problem in

The explicit purpose of the Gospel of John is also the implicit purpose of all Holy Scripture: “These things are written that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, with the result that, because you believe, you have life in his Name” (John 20:31).

et werde/so wyr glewbe an den/der in unsern hern Ihesum Christ
ferweckt hat von den todten/wilcher ist vmb vnser sund willen
vnn geben/vnd vmb vnser gerechticheyt willen aufferweckt.

Das Funft Capitel

Wyr denn sind red
so haben wyr fride
Christ/durch wilch
glawben/zu diser gn
der hoffnung der kunfftige
vnn aber das/sondern wyr
yl wyr wissen/das trubsal
arung/die erfahrung aber bringet
ht zuschanden werden Das alles
ausgossen vnn vnser
en ist.
Denn auch Christ
fur vns gottlosen
a willen/vmb de
arumb preysset
torbe ist/da wyr
rch yhn behalten
itt rechtfertiget

two Jews who were on their way to Emmaus and corrected it through a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament: “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Even though they knew the Old Testament, it remained a “closed” book until Christ opened it up and showed them that it was about Him: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). Such Christological interpretation was also the central core of Luther’s exegesis: “Therefore he who would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he finds Christ in it . . . if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets as to find that Christ came from heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose, and ascended so that through him I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading of Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation.” This Christological interpretation is also the dominant accent of the exegetical theology taught at this seminary. Therefore, the explicit purpose of the Gospel of John is also the implicit

Even though the study of Holy Scripture at seminary has an academic flavor (yes, there are rigorous assignments and difficult exams), it is never purely a learning process that enlightens the mind. The study of exegetical theology is meant to be of spiritual benefit to the seminary student as his mind and heart are formed by the Word of God to be a shepherd of Christ’s flock.

purpose of all Holy Scripture: “These things are written that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, with the result that, because you believe, you have life in his Name” (John 20:31).

Even though the study of Holy Scripture at seminary has an academic flavor (yes, there are rigorous assignments and difficult exams), it is never purely a learning process that enlightens the mind. The study of exegetical theology is meant to be of spiritual benefit to the seminary student as his mind and heart are formed by the Word of God to be a shepherd of Christ’s flock. The Holy Spirit not only works through the Word publicly proclaimed in Chapel and privately pondered in devotions, but He also powerfully works through the Word discussed in the classrooms and dissected in a study carrel to nurture the heart that “burns” with faith in Christ.

This study of exegetical theology is not only for personal edification, but is also meant to benefit a sinful and dying world. Once a biblical text is interpreted, its message must be proclaimed and applied to others. This truth is powerfully expressed in Holy Scripture through the portrait of the prophet eating the scroll given him by the Lord (Ezekiel 2 and Revelation 10). The scroll tasted sweet in his mouth, but then became sour in his stomach because it contained a

message of both God’s judgment and grace that had to be shared with others. Exegetical classes offer the scrolls of God’s Word to students in order that they inwardly digest them with the result that, like the faithful prophets Ezekiel and John, they are compelled to let this ingested Word come forth from their lips as a message of both condemning Law and comforting Gospel to the world: “Thus says the Lord.”

The study of Holy Scripture is the foundation of pastoral formation because in it Christ offers Himself to us and with it we offer Christ to the world. The well-known Collect for the Word aptly expresses the approach to exegetical theology at the seminary: *Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.*



The Rev. Dr. Charles A. Gieschen is Chairman and Associate Professor of the Exegetical Theology Department at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.