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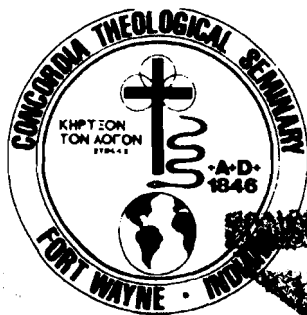
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Spiritual Wellsprings for the Professional Church Worker

Donald L. Deffner

Blues, Twentieth Century Blues, are getting me down.
Who's escaped those weary Twentieth Century blues?
Why, if there's a God in the sky, shouldn't He grin?
High above this dreary Twentieth Century din,
In this strange illusion, chaos and confusion,
People seem to lose their way.
What is there to strive for
Love, or keep alive for—say
Hey, Hey, call it a day. Blues, nothing to win or lose.¹

These words of Noel Coward aptly describe the Twentieth Century person of whom St. Paul also wrote twenty centuries ago: “Ye were without Christ. . .having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). And yet, since we who number ourselves among the body of Christ are also “*in the world,*” some of the world’s hopelessness rubs off on us at times. We fail to heed Paul’s advice to the Roman Christians—“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold” (Rom. 12:2, Phillips)—and walk around with our chins on the ground when they should be thrust up into the air “from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We examine this problem: the discouragement, the weakness of faith, the lack of spiritual vitality which often plagues the “professional church worker”—the teacher, the director of music, the missionary, the deaconess, the pastor. No gimmicks will be suggested, no tricks, no easy solutions, because there are none. But we will attempt to see “old wine in new bottles”—to re-examine the wellsprings of our spiritual life and to see what our Lord’s Word has to say to those of us whose spirits are low when they should be rejoicing.

A portion of 1 John 4 is poignantly apropos at this point. It speaks of the disarming love of our God which bears up the professional church worker who is overwhelmed by feelings of

inadequacy and fear, of spiritual and emotional dyspepsia (1 John 4:13-19, Phillips):

The guarantee of our living in Him and His living in us is the share of His own Spirit which He gives us.

We ourselves are eyewitnesses able and willing to testify to the fact that the Father did send the Son to save the world. Everyone who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God finds that God lives in him, and he lives in God. So have we come to know and trust the love God has for us. God *is* love, and the man whose life is lived in love does, in fact, live in God, and God does, in fact, live in him. So our love for Him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when He shall judge all men—for we realize that our life in this world is actually His life lived in us. Love contains no fear—indeed fully developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty. This means that the man who lives in fear has not yet had his love perfected.

Yes, we love Him because He first loved us.

“God has given us of His Spirit” (v. 13). This is the only power which can pull the professional church worker out of the doldrums when one’s work is wearying, one’s mind is meandering, and one’s faith is faltering. “Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” And the Spirit of God speaks to us and strengthens us, first of all, in the Scriptures.

I.

How much times does each of us spend with his Bible apart from professional use of it? Here, above all, the professional church worker should be perfectly at home. Strength comes when one picks up the Bible and prepares to take a long, sweet drink of that “milk of the Word.” Some have suggested that the Bibles we have in our homes never be closed, that they always be left open—on the table, by the bed, in the kitchen—better to remember the invitation of our Lord to “take up and

read.” But even if our Bibles are left open, how can we develop the right attitude to read the Scriptures for our own *personal* spiritual growth (and not just the next Bible class or sermon), and actually have a quiet time each and every day, when we retire to the “power room” in our house, which is that most quiet room of all, where our Blessed Lord will speak to us through His sacred Word?

For one thing, I believe we need to develop the attitude of viewing the Scriptures not only as divinely inspired, but also as a *living power*. If the Scriptures are only “God-in- a-box,” a codebook which proof-texts our neatly syllogized system of dogmatics, then no wonder they are of no help to us as the living, pulsating breath of the Almighty God Himself, to bolster up our sagging spirits and to fill us with “the abundant life” which God would give especially to those who “turn many to righteousness” (Dan. 12:3).

We need a more healthy respect for our Lord’s Word as an *active dynamic* in Scripture. “For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:18). Psalm 147:15 says: “He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth; His Word runneth very swiftly.”

We have a vibrant, impelling Word of God in Scripture, and it must especially be so in the life of the pastor or teacher of the church. Even professional church worker J.B. Phillips, who does not accept verbal inspiration, said in the original preface to his *Letters to Young Churches*:

The present translator who has closely studied these letters for several years is struck by two things. First, their surprising vitality. Without holding fundamentalist views on “inspiration,” he is continually struck by the living quality of the material on which he is working. Some will, no doubt, consider it merely superstitious reverence for “Holy Writ,” yet again and again the writer felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to “turn the mains off.”²

(Phillips' second point was the extraordinary unanimity of the letters.) We need a deeper regard for both the efficacy and the potency of the Word of God in Scripture, to go to it believing that the Holy Spirit will come to us when our spirits are low. For Scripture says: ". . . he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. . . Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6-7).

This also involves an intimate *devotional* use of the Scriptures. It means natural reference to that Word in daily conversation, as one speaks lovingly of an intimate and long-trusted friend. And it means there will be evidence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the one who "daily walks in the old paths" but whose life is ever inspired anew.

God grant that especially we, the so-called "full-time" church workers, may be examples to those we teach as students of the Scriptures. In addition to our concern for sound doctrine may our personal lives be succoured by a daily devotional draught from Holy Writ apart from our professional use of it. Then may our church again be known not only for its sauerkraut suppers in an open basement, not just for its splendid new churches on an open budget, but for its growth in grace and knowledge of our Lord—through an open Bible, open in living epistles the world can see, "known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

II.

A second wellspring of spiritual life which needs to be tapped by the spiritually weary professional church worker is the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism. We read—or at least *hear*—the Word of God. We go to Holy Communion—occasionally. But what do we do about our baptism? Do we take to heart the words of the Great Reformer when he came across a depressed parishioner and boomed out to him: "What's the matter, man, don't you realize you've been baptized?" Or do we learn the lesson which Katie taught the Blessed Martin Luther himself when she appeared in black one day and, in answer to his query as to who had died, replied that God had died, or at least Martin was acting that way?

Even the professional church worker can often lead a life of practical atheism: *professing* belief in God, *acting* as if one did not, arranging one's schedule, planning one's work, conduct-

ing the affairs of the day, without once taking the whole matter to the Lord in prayer—without once remembering that by the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism one was adopted into the very family of the Almighty God of the universes, and that one is no longer an orphan lost like a speck in the cosmic dust, but has received the “adoption of sons” through this “washing of regeneration” and is destined to live and reign—in Christ—to all eternity.

But do we have this overpowering concept of our baptism? Often we do not. If we are asked the pertinent question—“what does your baptism mean to you today?”—beyond the usual doctrinal clichés our thoughts might turn to a rather wrinkled certificate stuck in some drawer, or to a framed certificate on the wall (including those cherubs with their aerodynamically unsound wings), or to that kindly sponsor who always sent birthday gifts until we were eighteen or nineteen, or to the gifts we forgot to send the child for whom we are sponsor.

But we have often lost the “breadth and length and height and depth” of our baptismal grace and its blessings. For our own Holy Baptism—like the Word of God—is living and active, too. It is a dynamic, a power. Our daily affirmation of it should lead us up to Calvary, nail us to the cross, make us die with Christ, put us under cover of the earth, and bring us forth again into newness of life³—as we recall that “we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. . . that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

Here is strength for the weary worker, the tired toiler, the tense teacher, the impoverished preacher, in the daily affirmation of the sacred baptismal vow.⁴ I believe we should even have an occasional immersion in our baptismal ceremonies to dramatically remind us of the “drowning to sin” which is ours through faith in Christ, God’s blessed Son. We need to lay far greater stress on our own baptism, and that of our people, if we would receive the *full* benefits of this means of grace.

This is especially true since, living in the times we do, our contemplation of our baptism (at least for many people) may be a far more meaningful reminder of our salvation than some other theological concepts.⁵ As Robert C. Schultz suggests,

The pictures which Scripture uses to describe baptism are readily understandable and within the common framework of experience. It is the ship which saves us from being drowned in the flood. It is a washing. It is a being born again to new life. . . The latter should be particularly meaningful to a society in which adoption is as popular as it is today. Even the younger children can understand what it means to be an orphan; and they can appreciate the new life which the orphan receives when it is adopted.⁶

We need to learn the blessings of a baptism daily affirmed and repeat the hymn (*Lutheran Worship*, 225, stanza 2):

With one accord, O God, we pray;
Grant us Your Holy Spirit;
Help us in our infirmity
Through Jesus' blood and merit;
Grant us to grow in grace each day
By holy Baptism that we may
Eternal life inherit.

III.

A third wellspring of power for the church worker is the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist. It may not be as difficult to benefit from this sacrament in stirring up the fires of our smoldering faith. For its enactment is in the here and the now, and not in those dim, distant days preceding our first childhood memories.

Here again we have not a dead doctrine but a dynamic drama. It is a drama! It is stirring, moving. It has a cast of characters: God and humanity. The script for the drama is in the Holy Scriptures. The plot is almost melodramatic: it is the rescue of a fallen child through an amazing plan devised by the divine Father. And this drama is told every time we worship in the Holy Communion service.⁷

There, vicariously, we are swept with all mankind into the gripping plot as it develops between God and humanity. There each week as we take our place on the stage of history and see the drama of the Lord's institution of His Holy Supper, we see the broad sweep of the dramatic events of salvation pass before our eyes again, as "we remember the Lord's death until He

comes again. . .” At least this is what this Eucharist (meaning “thanksgiving”), this service of joy and praise, is supposed to be. But how often is it that way for the tired minister conducting the service, the organist at the console, or the teacher shepherding a noisy bunch of Sunday School children in the third pew?

Once I attended a Holy Communion service, sitting in the pew. I say “attended” because I hardly worshipped. That service was not a Eucharist—a thanksgiving—it was a test of faith! The *Gloria in Excelsis* was sung like a funeral dirge. There was no joy of sins forgiven here, no lifting up of hearts. This was not *Te Deum*, but tedium! How can we expect to be spiritually refreshed when we have so lost the concept of joyful Eucharist which the Lord meant to be ours in the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood?

Many of us—long-term professional church workers—have not fully appreciated the meaning and the blessing of this sacrament. As von Schenk says:

Doubtless this is the cause of much spiritual weakness in our church life. It was not so in the beginning. The central worship of the early church was the Holy Communion. The prime motive which led Christians to form themselves into a fellowship was the desire to worship in their special Christian way. That way was the celebration of the Holy Communion. Back of their coming together was, first and foremost, the desire to celebrate the Real Presence of Christ in the Communion. We have gone a far way from the pristine Church!¹⁸

It would be good Lutheran practice for every congregation, through its pastor, at least to offer the Holy Communion to the faithful on every Lord’s Day and also on other Scriptural feast days when desired. So say our Lutheran Confessions—the doctrinal statements which all our congregations have promised to uphold.

It is true, as Luther said, we should receive when we are “impelled by hunger and thirst therefor”; but this hunger and thirst will come as we receive, and the more we receive, the more we will hunger and thirst. If we urge our people to read the Bible daily, if we insist that they attend church every Sunday, why then should we not insist that they come to Holy Communion?¹⁹

To those who say that, if they receive the Sacrament more frequently, then it will become less sacred and less of a blessing to them, I say: "These are the persons who have never tried it!"

Nor should Luther be misquoted as saying that going to Holy Communion four times a year is adequate. What Luther rather said was that, if a person went to the Lord's Supper too infrequently, he doubted whether that person was a Christian. Luther says: "Negligence of the Sacrament I call treating the Lord's Supper with contempt. If you wish such liberty, then take even a little more and cease to be a Christian, then you need not believe or pray—for one is as much Christ's commandment as the other!"¹⁰

But so often in our services, there is not this spirit of worship, of communion, of the real presence of Christ. As J.S. Whale put it in his *Christian Doctrine*: "Instead of putting off our shoes because the place whereon we stand is holy ground, we are taking nice photographs of the burning bush, from suitable angles. We are chatting about theories of the atonement with our feet on the mantelpiece, instead of kneeling down before the wounds of Christ."¹¹

Consider these words from a pastor—counsel which is fitting to us teachers, ministers, professional workers one and all:

After a number of years in the ministry, I realized that a preaching and teaching ministry was not adequate for the presentation of the life of Christ and in bringing down the great acts of the Redemption to realities in Christian living. The solution to the problem lies in the Sacrament, the fostering of the Sacramental Life, which to me means receiving the Holy Communion regularly and faithfully. This is the method and directive of Jesus to show forth His death, and this method cannot fail. . . I know what the Holy Communion can do, and I have experienced the Presence of my Lord, because I faithfully celebrated and received the Communion for many years. . ."¹²

To all of these words I can only add a hearty, personal "Amen." Increasingly this Sacrament has come to have such rich meaning in my own life. A highlight of my week comes at that moment when, having been fed by the tasty bread of God's Holy Word in the service, I receive His precious body and blood in the Holy Sacrament, and the semi-circle of communicants

in the chancel is swept into mystical union with all the saints in heaven who complete that circle on the other side of the empty tomb.

This realization of the death of our Lord is a means (again under the operation of the Holy Spirit) of an active fellowship with Christ (for the professional church worker). The believer absolutely yields his person to that transcendent vision of his crucified Redeemer, and thus enters into a communion with Christ Himself. Christ takes him, penetrates him, and assimilates him to Himself.¹³

God grant that we—like Brother Martin—be not afraid to reform the church, and restore this Blessed Sacrament to its rightful place of honor among us.

IV.

The third Lutheran sacrament is that of Private Confession and Holy Absolution. Of course, here we are using the term “sacrament” in its broad sense, as Frederic Mayer says in *Religious Bodies in America*: “It is sometimes said that the Sacrament serves as a sign and seal of God’s grace to the individual and may be viewed as the individualized Word. From this view it is in order to call private or individual absolution a sacrament, and to urge its retention for the individual’s necessary assurance.”¹⁴ Consider these statements from our Lutheran Confessions:

Apology, XI: “Certainly most men in our churches use the sacraments, absolution and the Lord’s Supper, frequently in the year.”

Apology, XII: “Of Confession and Satisfaction”: “For we also retain confession, especially on account of the absolution, as being the Word of God which, by divine authority, the power of the keys pronounces upon individuals. Therefore it would be wicked to remove private absolution from the church. Neither do they understand what the remission of sins or the power of the keys is, if there are any who despise private absolution.”

Smalcald Articles, III: VIII: “Of Confession”: “Since absolution or the power of the keys is also an aid and consolation against sin and a bad conscience, ordained by Christ in the Gospel, confession or absolution ought by no

means to be abolished in the church. . . For since private absolution originated in the office of the keys, it should not be despised, but greatly and highly esteemed, as all other offices of the Christian Church.”

Large Catechism, V: “The Sacrament of the Altar”: “We go to confession. . . because we are poor miserable men, and just because we are unworthy, unless it be some one who desires no grace and absolution nor intends to reform.”

The Small Catechism, V: “How the Unlearned Should Be Taught to Confess.”

Augsburg Confession, XI: “Private absolution ought to be retained. . .”

Augsburg Confession, XXV: “Confession in the churches is not abolished among us. . .”

Here are some comments of Luther: “I will let no one take away private confession and would not exchange it for all the wealth of the world, for I know what strength and comfort it has given me” (“Of Confession”). “I know the devil well. If you had known him as well as I, you would not have thrown private confession so quickly to the wind” (Sermon against Carlstadt, 1522). “Of private confession, which is now observed, I am heartily in favor, even though it cannot be proved from the Scriptures; it is useful and necessary, nor would I have it abolished; nay, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences” (“Babylonian Captivity of the Church”).

I am convinced that in the Lutheran Church we have deprived ourselves of one of the greatest blessings in our heritage. We pay lip service to the benefits of private confession. We extoll its virtues to those whom we teach and train in the faith. But so often we, the professional church workers, are the greatest strangers of all to this means of grace.

For often, with Satan throwing all his might and main against the church workers’ Achilles’ heels of pride and fear, the burdened pastor or teacher cannot find assurance of forgiveness without private confession. And yet one still does not use this sacrament for the comfort of one’s soul and to receive the peace of Christ.

Is it because we erroneously think the General Confession at the beginning of the service suffices as a substitute for private confession? This is too easy an “out” to let many a conscience sleep; the whole thing is over in a few seconds! Furthermore, we must note that, when Luther spoke of “General Confession,” he meant our hymnal’s opening confession not at all. He was referring to the private confession of sins in general, naming none in particular. Our present “Confession of Sins” in the hymnal is historically a direct result of Reformed and Pietistic influences.¹⁵

Or do professional church workers avoid private confession because we doubt the trustworthiness of the pastor to whom we might unburden the soul? Then by all means let us go to a man to whom we might willingly confess. I must “confess”; it took me many years before I came to the point of putting into practice what I had mouthed as a laudable practice for so long. But now I will say with Luther: “I would not exchange it for all the wealth in the world.”

This is not to say private confession is mandatory or that any specific sins must be named. Furthermore, as Luther affirmed, it cannot be “proved from the Scriptures,” but it nevertheless exists as a practice of the church—like confirmations, dedications, installations, and so on—which “ought to be retained” and used among us—especially by those who call themselves leaders in God’s Kingdom.

V.

A fifth wellspring for the revitalization of the spiritual life of the professional church worker is prayer. As 1 John 4:16 says:

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

“Prayer” is not an assortment of words aimed toward God, but involves our total relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The trouble is we often take too seriously the little wall motto: "Prayer changes things." It does not change things so much as it changes *people*.¹⁶ Prayer changes the *individual* who prays. *God* does it. And even the professional church worker must learn this lesson over and over again. This point is basic in the New Testament. We are directed into a new *relationship* with God. Somehow we always seem to be groping for God when just the opposite is true. God is always there, wanting a relationship whereby He can line our will up with His.

How did our Saviour put it? He spoke of the Shepherd looking for lost sheep. We have switched the story to read: We are sheep looking for a lost shepherd. But because we so hesitate to have ourselves changed, we block the recognition that God is there, desiring to conform our will to His. We teachers, pastors, workers, must relearn the truth that prayer is not primarily a device for getting at *things*.

And no matter how long and noble a term of service we have had in the church, we also need to learn to expect our life to be altered by God. Prayer is blasphemy if, though we talk to God, we do not want Him to move in on us and really change our lives. It is blasphemy if we say in effect: "Here I go through my routine prayer, but, God, don't touch a thing in my existence! Don't tidy up my life; leave it just as it is!"¹⁷

And why not use our bodies—our arms and our legs—when we pray? Various attitudes of prayer can be of inestimable help to the individual to put one into the right frame of mind. Of course, one does not have to fold his hands or bow his knee to talk to God. But just take a look at the Old *and* New Testaments and see the various devotional postures of prayer which our predecessors in the communion of saints have used. And then let us *use* them. Let us learn how to kneel again. Let us learn how to make the sign of the cross again, which was lost to our church through the influences of Pietism and Rationalism, not because it was "Roman Catholic." And may we—ministers and teachers and laity—learn how to say our prayers in God's temple during the week. I venture to say that most of us would be just a little bit shocked—*mirabile dictu*—if we would wander through the nave of a late afternoon and see our pastor or teacher counterpart in our parish just sitting

or kneeling in a pew, contemplating the grace and mercy and love of God.

We are a clergy, we are a teaching ministry, we are a church which has still often not learned how to pray. By the power of the Holy Spirit, a quickened prayer life can draw us into a deeper and deeper relationship with our Heavenly Father as we contemplate the sacrifice of His Son on the cross for our sins and once more speak to God the Father as our own true Father. For, says John, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

VI.

Besides tapping the spiritual wellsprings, the professional church worker should be concerned for increased intellectual and cultural sensitivity as well. Take the "test" which follows. Try to characterize the individual's position or mark in society with a word or a phrase which goes well beyond "I've heard the name." For good or ill these people often contribute powerfully to the value systems of our people. Do you know them?

Deidre Hall	Sidney Sheldon	Jimmy Hendrix
Danielle Steel	Albert Camus	Joan Baez
Orrin Hatch	Mary B. Whitehead	Glenn Close
Bill Moyers	Ellen Goodman	Leonard Nimoy
Steven Spielberg	Amy Grant	Marjorie Holmes
Allan Bloom	James Reston	Bruce Springsteen
William Safire	Michael J. Fox	Phil Donahue
Paul Simon	Shelley Long	Crystal Gayle

Taking this mental test may alert us to see how little we may be aware of the world around us in which our people live and from which they derive so many of their values. We need to know this world and keenly understand the composition of its design that we might better confront it. There is a phrase in 1 John 4, just a line, which should not be overlooked: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." The Christian is *in* the world, but not to be *of* the world, or to become so identified with it that like Mrs. Lot when the world passes away one is destroyed with it. But the Christian is *in* the world.

And much of the professional church worker's anxiety can come from *just* this problem—not growing intellectually in keeping with one's spiritual growth. Much of our frustration as teachers and ministers can come from our feelings of inadequacy because we have not kept pace culturally. We have often failed to develop a critical awareness of the fast-moving and complex society around us which the Lord has called us to serve.

This was the command of our Lord to the first man *in* the world and remains our challenge today: "Replenish the earth, and subdue it." But some of us still have the impression that, if we just know the Scriptures, then we need know nothing else. This bespeaks an anti-intellectualism which can plague the church. We need to combat such a canker which can destroy our fruitfulness as kingdom workers in the world. We need to learn how to be knowledgeable critics of our culture, advocates of lifelong learning and continuing education, no matter what our age may be.

Christians can sit in nice, warm churches, with all the familiar sights and sounds, and feel "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." But often we are not reaching other people. For many of them have joined the "nation of videots," subjecting themselves sixteen hours a day to the boob tube, and are engulfed by the mass media which train them in the values of a culture of this city, and not of the "city to come." The world around them has "squeezed them into its own mold" (Rom. 12:2, Phillips). And the preacher who is out of touch with that culture may fail to challenge its heretical world view. Or he may preach in a way which is remote or irrelevant to modern ears. As John A. Rice commented on a preacher who was not "getting through":

To hear him was like quietly getting drunk. He led his hearers by easy stages into an unreal world of effortless peace, dragging them gradually into unconsciousness by the melody that was himself. They went home to eat their Sunday dinners in dazed silence and remained befuddled until Monday morning, when they woke up and went about their business.¹⁸

We often need improved communication skills to reach our people and the "real world" in which they live. But we also need a reexamination of the church's relation to the world in which they are to be salt, light, and heaven. For the gap between pulpit and pew is often compounded by false lay attitudes about the pastoral office and what the church's role in society should be. The liability lies in the evil of "clericalism"—the fatuous assumption that church work is largely that which preachers can be hired to do. As Richard R. Caemmerer has noted:

In the Lutheran Church this view has been reinforced by the philosophy of the ministry peculiar to it historically, that of *das Predigtamt*, the assumption that the pastor is in the world chiefly to preach sermons, that his other tasks are minor or emergency, and that the impact of the church upon the world is a process of dignity, form, ceremonial. Christians who love their pastor and are schooled as listeners, in a world moving slowly and finding time for words, are touched by this ministry. But animalist man will be cocooned and insulated against it.¹⁹

And the church's task of mission and evangelization needs concomitant reassessment.

The strategy suggested by Scripture itself for making contact with the aloof worldling is this: the Christian alive in the world, totally different in character and attitudes toward his fellowman from others, impelled by the grace of Christian love within him must arouse his fellowman to a response of interest to the source of his power. The Christian must then give the answer, the reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear. To make this strategy effective, the individual Christian must be trained with every existing resource of public and private ministry, as well as such new devices which may appear available.²⁰

That "device," that golden opportunity of increased training for pastors has happily arrived in full force in recent years. Concordia Theological Seminary of Fort Wayne, Indiana, alone offered fourteen extension courses in the United States

and Canada in 1988. The Doctor of Ministry program at Christ College, Irvine, in California is in its fourth year. Satellite programs have begun at Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois, and Concordia College, Mequon, Wisconsin. And the on-campus offerings at Fort Wayne list some eleven courses.

I have heard first-hand the excitement of pastors who have pursued their continuing education in a broad range of courses (exegetical, practical, etc.). I can still see one brother eagerly striding toward an early morning summer class held here at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. He was “on fire” because at the age of fifty-nine he still wanted to be a better pastor to his people back in a small parish in southern Minnesota. Another said: “It’s been twenty-five years since I’ve taken a good, hard look at my preaching, and I thought it was about time.” Responses to such continuing education courses abound with exhilaration:

I go away affirmed, filled with ideas, renewed for my task and vocation.

I really felt good about the sharing of the brothers in the profession.

I am “filled to the brim!”

I feel a renewed sense of inspiration in my sermonizing.

The course broadened my outlook into the utilization of non-theological books (fiction, novels) to enrich me in my way of articulating the Word of God, expressing it in ways that can be understandable without losing the Gospel message.

A totally new idea was introduced by suggesting commenting on literature and items used by the media, with the intent of offering a Christian appraisal. Our people hear, some read many things, and pastors ought to assist in pointing out what is good and what is dangerous in these materials.

I’ve learned to be more sensitive to people—where they are—what they are feeling—what they need—many resources have been made available for future study and growth.

Wow! I would love to do this again!

What an open door for pastors to “retool” with an indepth group study of Scripture and the Confessions—but then also to be resensitized to the issues and cultural forces of our day, so we might more skillfully bring the Gospel to our own people—and also to the children of the New Age who know not the Lord.

Even more could be said about the need for the professional church worker to study literature, ancient and modern, to study art, music and the sciences. In all of these areas we can see the greatness of our God, as He continues to reveal Himself to us. One staggers at the list of discoveries in just our own generation which impress us even more with the goodness, the majesty, the wisdom, and the love of our God. We also need to read the Book of the World to know more about our mighty and gracious God.

The professional church worker must particularly know the books and periodicals of our day. Indeed, much of it is filth—degrading, depressing, discouraging stuff. Many current publications are shot through with hopelessness and nihilism and the meaninglessness of life. Niebuhr calls their authors “the merchants of despair.” And they typify so often the individual of whom John C. Cooper wrote:

A soldier with no zest for fighting
A poet with no zeal for writing,
An architect without a plan;
The prototype of modern man.²¹

But the cynical and chaotic characters in these books have their counterpart in real life—in the people you and I are trying to reach with the Gospel. They are there in the young people who are endorsing suicide on the grounds that there is nothing after death. An example occurred in Abigail Van Buren’s column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

Dear Abby: I read in the paper where a woman died and her husband couldn’t live without her so he shot himself...Don’t you think his killing himself was beautiful?
Jan

Poor Jan—confusion, futility, and despondency are widespread. So a sociology professor at the University of California begins many of his lectures with the shocker: “Man is no damn good!”

We *in* the church may often not understand people with attitudes like these. Or we may try to laugh them away with our jokes. But we still are not reaching many of these disillusioned people. And this can add to our sense of frustration and inadequacy as professional church workers.

The world is “too much with us.” But we still have the responsibility of our ministry of reconciliation to these people *in* the world, and we must know, expertly, what this culture of ours is like and what makes it tick if we are going to be able to reach it. The professional church worker may too often be cocooned away from the very world one is trying to serve. And much of one’s sense of frustration comes from one’s isolation from life “as it is.” Accordingly we may mouth a “gospel” without reference to life. No wonder people stay away from our churches in droves.

I believe that plumbing the writing of the *perceptive* literary artists of our day can be a boon for the professional church worker in better understanding and reaching our culture.²² We first of all are to be students of the Holy Scriptures. But then, particularly in an age where we are overwhelmed by vast amounts of data we cannot digest, we can turn to “the prophetic voices in modern fiction” (William Mueller’s phrase). There we can see the handwriting on the wall of where our society is headed. As Charles C. Osgood says:

Secular literature cannot equal Holy Writ in power or authority of efficacy as a means of grace. Yet it may illustrate, reinforce, verify, and illuminate Holy Writ. . . It may serve us as the sycamore tree served Zacchaeus, to gain a clearer insight of the Incarnate Truth.²³

And then we are “driven back to the Gospels, there to discover who we are, and whose we are—whence we came and where we are going. And there we meet Him who *is* the Person we are to become, *and* the Power to be that new creation—our Blessed Lord Himself.”²⁴

In sum, the professional church worker needs an ever-increasing intellectual and cultural sensitivity that we might (1.) better communicate with people, (2.) reassess the relation

of the clergy to the laity, and of the church to the world, and (3.) better interpret and reintensify the church's task of mission and evangelization. A biblically-minded study of the perceptive literary artists of our day can be a beneficial aid in this direction. Lifelong continuing education for the professional church worker should be a top priority.

Conclusion

All of this concern in the professional church worker's life with Scripture, the sacraments, prayer, and study is empowered by Christ's love implanted in our hearts. "Christ in me," Paul says some thirty-two times in the New Testament. "We love Him, because He first loved us." For many, the motives in our Christian life and in our work in the church can so easily become the motives of the Law: "duty," "obligation," "God commands," "God demands," "God expects," and so on. But our Christian faith is not a set of "thou shalt not's."

We serve God in the church and in the world, because we love Him. It is our "sowing to the Spirit," not the fulfilling of the law, which is the only true motive of Christian work. The disarming love of God—pegged on a cross in the person of His beloved Son—is the *only* motive for our teaching or preaching ministry, whatever the task may be. Even then, love is not just a "motive." Love is always action, or it is not love.

Shortly after the First World War, the main feature of a concert in London was the violin performance of the great Fritz Kreisler. A newspaper published this item the morning of the performance: "The crowd tonight will not be there to honor a man who fought under the Austrian flag. It will attend only to hear the remarkable Guarnerius violin that will be played." The thunderous applause had hardly died down after Mr. Kreisler's first number, when he shocked the audience into silence by breaking the violin over his knee! "I bought this thing at a department store this morning for two pounds, six pence," he explained. "Now I shall play the rest of the program on my Guarnerius." Then he went on to thrill his audience with the fact that the wonderful music was not in the instrument, but in the master who held the instrument.

It is not the professional church worker—it is not the instrument—but our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of us all, who deserves the praise and the glory. And it is not the church

worker who is going to be able to meet the exigencies, tests, and frustrations of daily life in the Kingdom of God. But it is going to be the Master, the Creator of the instrument, who alone can help us at all. We depend not on ourselves, but on the Lord. We say with John: "We have *known* and *believed* the love that God hath to us." We must learn to repeat: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" As 1 John 4:17 puts it (according to Phillips):

So [your] love for Him [will] grow more and more, filling you with complete confidence for the day when He shall judge all men—for you [will] realize that your life in this world is actually His life. . .lived in you!

Endnotes

1. Noel Coward, "Twentieth Century Blues" (Chappell, 1931).
2. J.B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p.xii.
3. Robert K. Menzel, "Messengers of Peace" (Los Angeles: Preaching—Teaching—Reaching Mission to Ministers, 1958), section 3, p. 3.
4. Happily the word "renew" has been excoriated from the new baptismal rite in usage today. The word gives a false impression if used in connection with confirmation. We cannot "renew" that which is totally God's act. We cannot "cooperate" with God and somehow "complete" that which is solely His gracious work in us.
5. For example, "justification" in the New Testament means that although we are wholly guilty, by Christ's death and resurrection we are pardoned. But in common speech today "justified" means *guiltless*. I am "justified" in going through a red light to take my critically ill wife to the hospital. I was not really "guilty" of breaking a law. This does not mean to imply that we eliminate the doctrine of justification in our teaching! But it must be carefully explicated.
6. Robert C. Schultz, " 'Justification' in the Sixteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The Cresset* (October, 1957), pp. 12-13.
7. Robert K. Menzel, Sermon of March 26, 1958.
8. Berthold von Schenk, *The Presence* (New York: Ernst Kaufman, 1945), p. 24.

9. B. von Schenk, pp. 21-22.
10. Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1935), p. 181.
11. J.S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 152.
12. B. von Schenk, pp. 31-33.
13. Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith* (Eaton and Mains, 1905), p. 431. I am unconcerned about those who eyebrow a "dated" reference. I still quote the Scriptures.
14. Frederic Mayer, *Religious Bodies in America* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), p. 160.
15. For many of these insights I credit one of my mentors, the sainted Paul H.D. Lang, "The Exodus of the Practice of Private Confession from the Lutheran Church and Its Implications: A Doctrinal, Historical, and Critical Study," conference paper, California-Nevada District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, October 27, 1952.
16. Edward Wessling, Sermon of October 21, 1956.
17. Ibid.
18. John A. Rice in Simeon Stylites, "Journalistic Preaching," *The Christian Century* (November 5, 1958), p. 1287.
19. Richard Caemmerer, "The Lutheran Church Faces the World," conference paper, Atlantic District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1942, p. 20.
20. Caemmerer, p. 30.
21. John C. Cooper, "Soul Searching" (source unknown).
22. "Without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure. . ." Martin Luther to Eoban Hess, March 29, 1523, *Luther's Correspondence*, trans. and ed. by Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs (United Lutheran Publication House, 1918), 11:176-177.
23. Charles G. Osgood, *Poetry as a Means of Grace* (Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 8.
24. Donald L. Deffner, *The Real Word for the Real World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 28.

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