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Table of Contents

The Faith of Christ: A Lutheran Appropriation of Richard Hays's Proposal	
Arthur A. Just Jr.....	3
Listening to Intertextual Relationships in Paul's Epistles with Richard Hays	
Charles A. Gieschen.....	17
Looking at the Moral Vision of the New Testament with Richard Hays	
Dean O. Wenthe.....	33
Walk This Way: A Theme from Proverbs Reflected and Extended in Paul's Letters	
Andrew E. Steinmann and Michael Eschelbach.....	43
With a View to the End: Christ in the Ancient Church's Understanding of Scripture	
Joel C. Elowsky.....	63
A Curriculum from and for the Church	
John T. Pless.....	85

We apologize for publication delays in recent years. We assure you that all overdue issues are in process and will be mailed as each is printed. We plan to be back on our normal quarterly publication schedule by January 2008. Thank you for your patience! The Editors

A Curriculum from and for the Church

John T. Pless

The 2005–2006 academic year at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is witnessing the inauguration of a new curriculum, which had been in the making for the better part of a decade. Over thirty years had elapsed since the seminary last revised its curriculum; however, changes in society and in the church, as well as an increasingly diverse student body—many of whom are fairly new to Lutheranism—prompted the faculty to reflect on the adequacy of the current curriculum to form the minds and hearts of future pastors for ministry in this new century. Curricular changes were neither made lightly nor without deliberation and some spirited debate. The process spanned several years as it engaged the faculty in the reading and discussion of a wide array of writers involved in theological education and pastoral formation in North America and abroad.¹

¹ The faculty read and engaged a number of articles and chapters of seminal books on theological education and pastoral formation including: David P. Scaer, "A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63 (October 1999): 269–280; Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001); Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35–152; L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001); John W. Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (July 2002): 255–268; Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism—Volume I: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 194–225; David Yeago, "The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited," in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley and David Yeago (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 49–93. Although published after the curriculum review committee had completed its work, the new book Charles Foster, et al. eds., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Formation* (Stanford, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006) appears to confirm the overall orientation of the new CTS curriculum.

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A significant text in this process was Reinhard Hütter's *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*.² Hütter develops the argument that doctrine is not a theoretical abstraction, but it is rather embodied in the concrete practices of the church: liturgy, preaching, pastoral care, catechesis, and mission. Hütter's insights, which were forged by his engagement with George Lindbeck, Oswald Bayer, and Erik Peterson were provocative in faculty discussion and formative for a curriculum centered in the practices of the church. Since the seminary's mission is "the preparation of pastors for the congregations and missions of the LCMS. . . . Its programs and services offer an understanding of Christian faith which is Christ-centered and biblically-based, confessionally Lutheran and evangelically active,"³ the new curriculum, too, is shaped by the realities that constitute the church, namely, the preaching of Christ crucified and the administration of the sacraments. A curriculum governed by the gifts of Christ in Word and Sacrament intentionally reflects both the life of the pastor and that of the congregation.⁴

Worship, therefore, is not a devotional addendum to the study of theology but the matrix for such study. Kramer Chapel dominates the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary not only architecturally but also thematically, as academic rigor is not separated from a life of faith nurtured by sermon and sacrament as well as doxologically expressed in the daily offices. The curriculum integrates exegetical and dogmatic studies, historical investigation of the church's traditions, and the development of pastoral skills with the ongoing worship life of the church centered in font, pulpit, and altar. This is the key to the revised curriculum.

This new curriculum seeks to catechize students into God's means of grace in a fundamental and holistic manner. It assumes regular participation in the Divine Service and the prayer offices of the church. Recognizing the fact that our culture is increasingly biblically illiterate and, moreover, that a significant number of students are either fairly new to the Lutheran Church or inadequately catechized in their home congregations,

² See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000).

³ *Concordia Theological Seminary: Academic Catalog 2005–2006* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2005), 20.

⁴ It should be noted that CTS now includes a Master of Arts degree leading to certification as a deaconess in the LCMS. Diaconal students take many of the courses required of Master of Divinity students. In the place of such courses as Hebrew, homiletics, and pastoral theology, the deaconess students take courses in the history of the office of deaconess, deaconess practice, and human care seminars. The deaconesses are also in a separate field education tract and complete an internship rather than a vicarage.

the new curriculum makes engagement with primary texts, especially the Holy Scriptures and the Small Catechism, a priority. The seminary does not exist to produce religious technicians, ecclesial managers, or psychological therapists, but rather thinking and speaking pastors who are able to articulate the truth of the gospel with competence and accuracy in a world fragmented and often chaotic. Our seminary president, Dean Wenthe, along with our academic dean, William Weinrich, provided excellent leadership to achieve this goal.⁵ The revised curriculum aims at forming students in their ability to think and act theologically with good skills: critical and analytic. The classroom and the seminary community should prepare the student to express the truth of the faith both orally and in writing.

There is less emphasis on isagogics and more emphasis on the reading, interpretation, and proclamation of texts, especially the texts of the Gospels. Plenary lectures as well as small working groups will be used in these classes as students are led to see how doctrine is derived from the biblical texts. Three Gospel courses are required (Gospel I: Matthew; Gospel II: Mark/Luke; Gospel III: John), and each student participates in six quarters of New Testament Greek Readings (one-hour seminars comprised of no more than six students). These seminars are devoted to the translation and interpretation of the Gospel lection for the coming Sunday in the church year with a view toward preaching. Thus, the seminar provides the student with a model for ongoing study. Faculty members from every department, not only the Exegetical Department, teach these seminars. Ability in Greek is a prerequisite for enrollment in the Master of Divinity program. Hebrew I and II are part of the required curriculum for those who enter without knowledge of this language.

There are no independent courses in isagogics or hermeneutics in the revised curriculum as these are covered within the exegetical courses. In addition to the Gospel courses, there are two required courses in the Pentateuch, and one course each on Pauline Epistles, the Major Prophets, and the Psalms. The Psalms course is interdisciplinary, taught by faculty from both the Exegetical and Pastoral Ministry and Missions Departments in order that the use of the psalms in worship and pastoral care is highlighted.

⁵ See Dean O. Wenthe, "More Than Leader, Administrator, and Therapist: The Scriptural Substance of the Pastoral Office," in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just Jr., Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 199-213.

A required course in catechetics focuses extensively on the use of the Small Catechism. It is expected that all students will be able to recite the six chief parts as well as the daily prayers by heart. The student is being catechized into the texts of the Catechism even as he is being prepared to teach it. The catechetics course approaches the Catechism not so much as a text book or educational resource but as a book of doctrine, prayer, and life so that the future pastor develops the *habitus* of a catechist.⁶

The teaching of liturgics has an expanded place in the new curriculum. Student assessments from recent years reflected the need for more depth in the study and practices of worship than was given in the one required course of the previous curriculum. The new curriculum has two required courses in liturgics. Liturgics I is devoted to the biblical foundations, historical development, and theological significance of the liturgy as well as instruction in the basics of officiating at the Divine Service and prayer offices. Liturgics II attends to the church year, hymnody, and worship planning.

Three required courses in the Lutheran Confessions introduce students to the historical background, doctrinal content, and ongoing relevance of the documents in the Book of Concord. The three courses in dogmatics follow a traditional, creedal outline in equipping students with the knowledge of Christian doctrine and practice in the ability to think theologically and articulate the confession of Christ with faithfulness, clarity, and coherence.

David Yeago has described pastoral theology as the hands and feet of dogmatics.⁷ The practical courses, therefore, endeavor to ground students in church practices that reflect our confession of Christ and enable him to distinguish law and gospel in proclamation and pastoral care, articulating the faith in our culture with integrity. Pastoral Theology I is, in large part, based on the Agenda that will accompany the *Lutheran Service Book*. This course begins with the rite of ordination as the map for pastoral identity and work. The liturgical forms of Baptism, confirmation,

⁶ For further development of this point, see John T. Pless, "Fidelity to the Catechism in Prayer and Preaching," *Lutheran Forum* 39 (Fall 2005): 8-15.

⁷ "Systematic theology is the tongue and mind of practical theology: it expounds the message to which we desire to be faithful. But practical theology is the hands and feet of systematic theology. It is the necessary fulfillment of all systematic theology, which must always intend to be in some sense church dogmatics, thinking interior and useful to the life of the church;" David Yeago, "Testing the Spirits: Practical Theology and the Crucified and Risen God," *Dialog* 22 (Fall 1983): 252. Also see Gerhard Sauter, *Gateways to Dogmatics: Reasoning Theologically for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 95-180.

confession/absolution, marriage, visitation of the sick, commendation of the dying, and Christian burial constitute the chief loci of the syllabus. Pastoral Theology II employs case studies to hone the student's ability to engage in spiritual diagnosis in order to make appropriate applications of the gospel. Pastoral Theology I and II are supplemented by a required course in pastoral counseling. A course entitled "Pastor, Congregation, and Synod" replaces the previous course in parish administration. This class attends to issues of churchmanship as well as kingdom-of-the-left aspects of congregational life.

Three courses in homiletics provide instruction in the theology of preaching especially the right distinction between the law and the gospel, sermon design, and delivery. Theological foundations and missional approaches consistent with Lutheran theology are at the heart of the course of an introductory course in missions and evangelism. Theological Ethics lays the foundation for a Lutheran approach to ethics in a postmodern world that is wary of assertions of absolute truth. Working from the premise that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the "boundary and basis"⁵ also for ethics, this course aims at assisting the student in thinking theologically about contemporary moral issues. A course in the previous curriculum, "Religious Bodies in America" has been replaced by a new course, "Ministry in a Pluralistic Context." Whereas the older course was basically a course in comparative symbolics, the new course takes up the challenges of so-called post denominational Christianity, world religions, new religious movements, competing world views, and cultural diversity with a view toward apologetics and missionary proclamation.

An overview of church history is provided in three sequential courses with an additional required course on the Lutheran Church in America as well as at least one history elective. The historical dimension of the curriculum demonstrates the catholicity of the church and examines the ways in which God's people have confronted error and confessed Christ in the past. A new feature of this curriculum is a seminar on Luther's writings. The topic for this seminar varies as a variety of instructors select key treatises from the corpus of Luther's writings for more intensive examination. For example, a systematic theologian might offer a seminar on "The Bondage of the Will" while a New Testament scholar might

⁵ Here, the work of Oswald Bayer is particularly helpful. See his chapter, "Justification: Basis and Boundary of Theology," in *By Faith Alone: Essays in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, ed. Joseph Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 67-85 and "Luther's Ethics as Pastoral Care," *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (Summer 1990): 125-142.

choose to host a seminar on Luther's lectures on John or a homiletics professor might investigate Luther's Advent sermons. It is hoped that this seminar will not only lead the student into a more in-depth knowledge of a specific area of Luther studies but that it will also equip him with the tools for continued study of the preeminent teacher of our church and his significance for pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the distinguishing feature of the CTS curriculum is the sequence of courses known as Theologia. These courses will be taught by a team of lecturers from the four departments. Theologia I is a first-year course based on Baptism. Theologia II focuses on preaching while Theologia III is built around the Lord's Supper. Each of these courses will be integrative in nature as components of exegesis, historical theology, systematic reflection, and liturgical/pastoral practice are brought together. For example, in Theologia I, students will exegete key New Testament baptismal pericopes, examine historic baptismal liturgies, homilies, and other patristic texts, study the doctrine of Baptism in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, and reflect on current baptismal practices. The course will utilize both plenary lectures and smaller weekly seminars similar to the format of the Gospel courses. The Theologia sequence indicates how deeply the curriculum is committed to the pastoral acts of Baptism, preaching, and the Lord's Supper.

Another integrative aspect of the curriculum is field education and vicarage. Field education at CTS consists of involvement in a local congregation for the first six quarters of each seminarian's career. Quarters three and four also include an institutional component where the student works in a hospital or nursing home/rehabilitation center. This experience in the field is linked with specific classes. For example, a student enrolled in catechetics is expected to teach the Catechism in his field education setting. Required one-hour plenary lectures for first- and second-year students each week works with specific readings to enhance theological development and further pastoral formation (see Appendix). In the first year, there is an intentional move from vocation to office (first quarter) to the character of the pastor and his work (second quarter) to the theology of the cross as the framework for understanding pastoral life and work (third quarter). The focus of the second year is on classical themes in pastoral care, using Luther's letters in both first and second quarters. The third quarter provides occasion to discuss the confessional nature of the pastor's work, demonstrating that doctrine and practice cannot be divorced. An intentional and pronounced goal of field education is to shape the spiritual

life of the pastor using Luther's well-known triad, *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.⁹

One of the more controversial aspects of the new curriculum is the reduction of electivity. The highly structured curriculum leaves room for only two electives. However the majority of the faculty agreed with the proposal as the new curriculum covers a broader range of topics in the required courses. Also offsetting the lack of electives are the six required modules on a range of practical issues such as stewardship, the pastor and the media, various ethnic ministries, particular issues in social ministry, specialized topics in pastoral care, time management, strategic planning processes, and ministries to special groups (youth, older adults, singles, military, campus, disabled etc.). The modules are about six hours each, often offered on a Saturday and taught by a visiting pastor or layperson with proven expertise in the field.

Supplementing the formal curriculum, is the so-called ungraded curriculum, that is, those occasions both spontaneous as well as planned that allow for mentoring, exposure to contemporary theological issues, and involvement in church life, including mission outreach and Christian service. Among the planned events would be the seminary's annual symposia in January, the Good Shepherd Institute's conference each November, regular Wednesday morning convocations, and a number of mission and servant events both in the United States and abroad.

The four traditional departments that have characterized theological education since the time of Schleiermacher¹⁰ are maintained, but the boundaries have become much more fluid in the revised curriculum. In presenting the new curriculum to the faculty, the curriculum review committee articulated what it believed its distinct advantages to be:

⁹ See John T. Pless, "The Triangular Shape of the Pastor's Devotional Life," in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Bart Day, et al. (Houston, TX: Feuerhahn Festschrift Committee, 2002), 317-331; Also see Oswald Bayer's forthcoming work *Theology the Lutheran Way*, tr. Jeffrey Silcock and Mark C. Mattes, to be released in September 2007 from Eerdmans. Bayer develops Luther's *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* in contrast to various forms of scholastic and speculative theologies, demonstrating the necessity for an ecclesiological context for the study of theology. In large part, Bayer's work seems to confirm the direction that the new CTS curriculum has charted, although our faculty did not engage it directly in our work on the new curriculum. This very significant volume provides a theological framework conducive to the goals of the new curriculum. I am grateful to Dr. Mark Mattes both for sharing the pre-publication manuscript of *Theology the Lutheran Way* with me and for the ongoing conversation with him regarding the significance of Bayer's work for contemporary confessional Lutheranism.

¹⁰ See Farley, *Theologia*, 73-98.

- It is primarily churchly *and* academic, namely, holistic in nature rather than disjointed and disciplinarian;
- It purposefully addresses our post-Christian society and world;
- It forms students through an understanding of baptismal, sacramental identity;
- It is built upon a participation in the life of God himself;
- It is highly interactive between faculty and students;
- It emphasizes primary texts and source documents, rather than secondary sources;
- It is ultimately concerned with pastoral education and formation rather than the simple imparting of information;
- It involves students from the beginning as novitiates, moving them toward the pastoral office;
- It models what a pastor actually does in the parish;
- It is shaped by the constitutive realities of the church's own life: Baptism, preaching, and the Lord's Supper;
- It involves mentoring, spiritual formation and relational aspects.¹¹

The curriculum review committee at Concordia Theological Seminary believes that the new curriculum is responsive to the needs of the church for pastors whose hearts and minds have been molded by the gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthened for intelligent and compassionate shepherding of the Lord's flock and the missionary confession of Christ Jesus in an unbelieving world. The curriculum endeavors to instill in the students "the virtues of the ordained life"¹² as the student not only studies the Scriptures but lives in them as part of the baptized community gathered on campus for prayer and study.

Making the transition to a new curriculum is not without significant challenges as it calls for adjustments on the part of students, professors, and administrators. Certainly and especially, it challenges professors to continue to work in a collegial fashion, to broaden their view beyond the discipline of their academic specialization, and to take into account more fully the purpose of theological education for the life of the church in the world. It will, no doubt, take a few years to refine and further develop the

¹¹ Memo from the Curriculum Review Committee—March 27, 2002.

¹² See William Willimon, *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

pattern of theological education and pastoral formation that we have set for ourselves. Yet we believe that it is well worth the effort in order that the LCMS might have well-formed pastors who work with confessional integrity as able ministers of the New Testament in a complex and chaotic world.

Appendix: Field Education as Component in the Revised Curriculum

	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter
First Year Weekly Lecture	Vocation & Pastoral Formation: the Life of Prayer – Key Texts: <i>The Minister's Prayer Book</i> edited by John Doberstein; <i>Luther on Vocation</i> by Gustaf Wingren.	The Character of the Lutheran Pastor – Key Text: <i>The Hammer of God</i> by Bo Giertz (small group discussions of this book).	Theology of the Cross and the Pastoral Office – Key Text: <i>On Being a Theologian of the Cross</i> by Gerhard Forde.
First Year Contextual Activities	Get acquainted with congregation, orientation with pastor.	Assist with liturgy – Accompany pastor on hospital/nursing home visits, evangelism and delinquent member visits.	Institutional visits – Observe/attend congregational board meetings.
Second Year Weekly Lecture	Classical Pastoral Care – Key Text: <i>Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel</i> edited by Theodore Tappert.	Luther letters continued.	Confession and Office – Key Texts: <i>The Lonely Way</i> - Vol. II by Hermann Sasse.
Second Year Contextual Activities	Institutional visits continue. Preach.	Teach Sunday School, Bible class, and/or Catechism.	Preach and Observe funeral.