

VOLUME 47  
NUMBER 1  
OCTOBER 2006

# The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal

*How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!*



**It is like precious oil  
poured on the head.**

(Ps 133:1,2a)

# The Lutheran Educator

The education journal  
of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
edited by faculty of Martin Luther College

VOLUME 47

NUMBER 1

OCTOBER 2006

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*The Lutheran Educator* (ISSN 0458-4988) is published four times a year in October, December, February, and May by Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284. Periodical Postage Paid at Milwaukee, WI.

Rates: One year—USA/\$12.00—single copy/\$3.00. Canada/\$12.84—single copy/\$3.21. All other countries—air mail \$18.80. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Write for multi-year rates. For single issue only, Wisconsin residents add 5% sales tax, Milwaukee County residents add 5.6% tax.

Subscription Services: 1-800-662-6093 extension 8 (Milwaukee 414-615-5785). Write NPH, 1250 N. 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284. Order online: [www.nph.net/periodicals](http://www.nph.net/periodicals)

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Educator*, %Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284.

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## Neither Right Nor Wrong?

A BBC news article recently reported that “pupils will no longer have to be taught the difference between ‘right and wrong’ under draft plans put forward by England’s exams regulator. Instead, 11 to 14-year-olds should learn the importance of ‘secure values and beliefs.’<sup>1</sup>

There is not that much news there for 21st century Americans. The trend for some time in our society has been the obliteration of objective truth and the promotion of tolerance, which means that no one should presume to be right or wrong. One can see these attitudes in almost every area of life, including the religious instruction by a good number of churches.

What a sad state of affairs it is when there is no right or wrong in life. Chaos and confusion can only result. But there are deeper issues than that. History textbooks often list “sharing common values” as one of the key components of a civilization. There is obviously something wrong with a civilization when its shared value is that there are no common values. With such a “foundation” for a civilization, people are left to flounder on their own to come up with their “secure values and beliefs.” And what is “secure” for one does not have to be “secure” for another.

As Christians, what a blessing it is to know right from wrong. To be sure, we have that knowledge only because God has imparted that to us. As Christian educators, what a blessing it is to be able to teach people, for their benefit and the good of others, what is right and wrong. We have that privilege through the divine calls we have received.

While we are in possession of God’s “right and wrong,” we deceive ourselves if we presume to have all the answers. *Adiaphora* abound in life. There are numerous issues which God has not addressed in the Bible. Those matters God leaves to Christians and their consciences that are shaped by his Word. There are also open questions; there are some subjects in the Bible that leave us wondering what the right answer might be.

But when it comes to the big issues in life, there is no uncertainty. Sin is always sin, and salvation is always God’s doing. God’s Word spells out very clearly what is right and what is wrong. God’s people, motivated by the love of Christ, strive to do the right and avoid the wrong as a tangible way of expressing their gratitude to God. And God’s people lovingly look to teach others what is right and wrong. After all, it’s not our right or wrong that we are following or advocating. It’s God’s. Am I right or wrong? There’s only one answer.

JFP

<sup>1</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/5230598.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/5230598.stm)



## The Christian's Real War

John R. Schultz

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*  
Ephesians 6:10-17.

The daily news programs have not been pretty. Cable and broadcast news give us a constant barrage of the devastation, mutilation, horror and death of war. Most of us have not personally experienced war's trauma and thus

often give it little lasting thought. However, as Christians there is a war we experience personally every minute of every day – and the LORD would have us give it a lot of thought. It is a spiritual war against evil spiritual forces. The casualties and deaths are more horrible than those pictured in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*. They are eternal.

The battle “is not against flesh and blood,” but against Satan and his evil legions. Therefore, earthly strategies are useless. The strength, ability, and power to wage this battle are only in the LORD. It is true that we regenerate Christians have a new spiritual life in our hearts; it is equally true that this life, unless renewed and supported by Christ each day, may be lost. It is necessary that we remain in intimate communion with Christ in his Word and Sacrament lest we be unqualified for spiritual battle.

To fight this spiritual battle, the LORD has provided the necessary armor so that we may stand victorious. *“Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you*

have done everything, to stand Ephesians 6:13. A Christian is to be encased in the armor of God from his head to his feet, in order to prevent Satan from using a single opening. He has many strategies and methods by which he hopes to overcome us. To meet this onslaught is beyond the puny power of man, but with the *“full armor of God”* our possession and in its proper place we go into battle.

But there’s more. The LORD gives us additional battle equipment for the fight: *“the belt of truth buckled around your waist,”* the soldier of God puts on Christ’s truth; *“the breast plate of righteousness,”* Christ’s righteousness given to us destroys Satan’s accusations; *“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace,”* like sandals on the feet of the soldier, the message of the Gospel is protective and supportive; *“the shield of faith,”* extinguishes the fiery attacks of Satan; *“the helmet of salvation”* protects from Satan’s attack and bears witness to victory; *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”* an offensive weapon striking at Satan with all the power of God’s Word. Luther knew the battle was also to be offensive: *“Here it is not enough that we defend ourselves against the devil with faith and hope as our shield and helmet, but*

*we must also draw the sword and go for him with such insistence that he must fall back and flee, and we thus obtain the victory over him.”*

As called workers it’s especially vital that we clothe ourselves in God’s armor and use his weapons. Look at the apostles Peter and Paul to learn that Satan fights especially hard to vanquish those who bring the Gospel to others. We need to use the Word privately as individuals. We need to gather around the Word in our various groups and faculty meetings. We need to remember that our classrooms are equipping grounds: training Christian soldiers to fight the good fight.

Read some more: Psalm 46

Prayer:  
Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus Going on before.  
Christ, the royal master, Leads against the foe;  
Forward into battle See his banners go!  
Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus Going on before.  
(CW 537, v. 1)

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# “Christian Politics”: The Best For Both Worlds

Frederick Wulff

## A fundamental lesson from the word

Most of us would agree that the deteriorating American culture needs a fix. The growing acceptance of disrespectful behavior, the prevailing use of obscene language, the drug scene and the ugly face of violence alarm us. It seems the church should do more to curb the ills of society. Well, a note of caution is in place here and a review of the doctrine of the two kingdoms. God does not intend for the church to rule a worldly government. The roles that God has given the church and the state are separate and distinct. He has given his means of grace to the church to bring salvation to all people; whereas the role of the state is to govern society with the power that resides in natural law. We Christians have dual membership, but we understand that the roles of church and state must not be confused. We should “give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and unto God that which is God’s” (Matthew 22:21). The church has no direct role over the state; there is no prescribed left or right strategy to rule. However, as individual Christians, we are to be the salt of the earth. Thus, as sanctified Christians, we should naturally be well-informed and active citizens. It follows then that individual

Christians will be valuable assets to any government

## Learning from history

If we can learn anything from history, it is the painful lesson that stems from a confusion of the church/state roles. Starting in the 4th century, under Constantine, Christianity became a sanctioned religion of the state. By the end of the century, the secular kingdom was wielding the keys that Christ had committed to the church. The sad years of papal power in secular matters are all too familiar to us. During the reign of the Renaissance popes, Luther’s powerful proclamation of the Word shook the worldly kingdom and power of Rome and the shameful state of the church. The churches of the Reformation, freed from worldly papal power, then wrestled with church/state relations in a new setting. Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession wisely stated: “The power of the church and the civil power must not be confused.” Unfortunately, the governments under both the Church of Rome and the Lutherans (Peace of Augsburg, *cuius regio, eius religio*) persecuted non-members in their regions. The Anabaptists, who were not power players, gave up on what they perceived

as the fallen church and the fallen state and disavowed the power of the government over them.

John Calvin's misconception of a Christian nation (commonwealth) is derived from his view of the church and state functioning as a firm partnership. Calvin placed more emphasis on externals than Luther in this respect. He used the state as an arm of the church whereby the magistrates helped him impose church rule in Geneva—to establish his “City of God.” In this plan, the elders of the church regulated outward behavior and had oversight over the lives of everyone. Through their mission zeal, the Calvinists (the Reformed Christian churches) spread the Gospel throughout the world and along with it, this concept of the Christian commonwealth. A shade of this view of Christian government or Christian nation is still evident in the thinking of the Religious Right. This is not meant to be a harsh judgment on the spirituality of those Christians. No doubt many of them are sincere Christians, but we still note that they have a fuzzy view of church/state relations in their concept of a Christian nation.

### **Politics as a worthy vocation**

Politics is achieving the possible. We live in a sinful world with people of all kinds of religious beliefs, or unbelief. We have to get along, in spite of differences, and that requires pragmatism and cooperation. In Iraq, hopefully that would mean Kurds, Sunni, Shiites and secularists,

with a sprinkle of Christians thrown in, will have to try to live together in the same geographic area. Some form of working government is necessary, because the alternative is civil war or anarchy. Throughout the world God provides government, as a stabilizing influence for order in a disorderly world: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1).

Here in the United States, the task of sharing participatory power does not seem so daunting as in the Near East. Still the work is challenging. Throughout our history we have had a number of selfless statesmen who have served for the greater public welfare. Christians, too, can serve in this noble endeavor of public service, often in a role of peacemaker among the factions, to achieve the best possible for the greater good. The desired effect is not always perfect. Jimmy Carter once said he personally opposed abortion for unwanted pregnancies at a time when many in his own party disagreed with him, but he sought what he believed the best possible alternative — parental notification guidelines, waiting periods against hasty actions and adoption options. His actions saved the lives of some children, though not all, who were helpless in their mothers' wombs.

### **Serving “our” constituency**

Within the Church, we can insist on the

supremacy of the Scripture, which had been given to the Church, but we must realize the government of secular society rules on the basis of natural law. The government serves a very broad constituency, many of whom are of different religious or philosophical persuasions. Politicians have to appeal to coalitions among diverse people to support various platforms within a political framework. In our country, we basically have a two party system, with a third party occasionally playing a role; and then within those parties we can further delineate those at the center, left of center, and right of center. The world of politics involves teamwork among heterogeneous groupings.

I would venture that if we constructed a sociogram and placed our church members as dots on a political spectrum, we might see some discernable pattern between rural churches and urban or inner city churches. We might be surprised to see some of our members outside the clusters of dots. Our commission to preach the Gospel to everyone has brought in, and hopefully continues to bring in, members that do not fit into the typical socio-economic framework of our established congregations.

Even within an average congregation, parents of our students have diverse outlooks. It is not realistic to expect everyone in a congregation, let alone a Synod, to have the same political viewpoints on all issues. Besides, political parties and political candidates themselves can, and do, change positions on various issues, often between the pri-

maries and the general elections. As Christians, we may agree on some issue, like respecting the sanctity of life. But, even here, we may diverge on specifics: like which wars are just wars, on rights to control gun ownership, on application of capital punishment or on choosing between the life of an endangered expectant mother and the life of the unborn child. Similarly, we may favor divergent methodologies on an acceptable social policy. The world of politics is very subjective.

### **Solving the problems of society**

Should we be as the Amish or Hutterites who give up on “sinful” government and withdraw into isolated communities? Should we turn governmental affairs over entirely to the secularists to determine policy? Should we do as the Reformed and impose our religious teachings on others? Hopefully, none of the above. Rather, I suggest that we as individuals, as the salt of the earth, be personally involved in the political process for the best possible outcomes. Our lesson plans may well vary as how we might best be a brother to our neighbor. We might share the same concern for the elderly, the poor, the unemployed, those on the margin of society and unborn babies, but our strategies for assistance could be quite different. Some, understandably, would see the government machinery as the key provider of assistance. Yet others might stress volunteerism and plans that foster self-reliance. Some speak of faith-based initiatives. Still others favor a combina-

tion, or all of the above. We do not necessarily all find agreement. Whatever the preference, hopefully our citizenship will reflect the love of Christ in us and not manifest an indifference to those in need.

### **The need for debate and exchange of ideas**

The lively debate between liberals and conservatives is not harmful, quite the contrary. In my over 25 years membership in the Organization of American Historians, I have thoroughly enjoyed discussions of professional papers submitted by leading historians of different persuasions. True, polls show that most historians are political liberals, but generally the wisest are quite fair-minded toward contrary views. However, in more recent years, the post-modernist extremists have shut down scholarly debate and in its stead place irrational nonsense. These individuals are a threat in that they tolerate no dissenting opinions. Apparently, for some, scholarship and research count for little and any contrary view is shouted down. My fear is that the OAH is being led into a political ideology that is at odds with this prestigious organization's original purpose – the exchange of scholarly knowledge. In earlier articles, I have strongly criticized professors of this emerging fringe, not because they were left or right, but because they stifle true debate. Some of their persuasion criticize private church colleges for possessing a narrow outlook. True, many private schools do have a distinct philoso-

phy and deeply held convictions, but for the most part, they are very civil and will allow other views to be expressed.

### **Seek “honest history” free of a political agenda**

Many of you readers probably recall a news release a number of years ago about the professional organization The History Society (THS) being formed to promote “honest” history. Fed up with militant driven agendas, the under-signed switched membership from the OAH for the more balanced THS. No doubt there are still fair-minded history professors in the OAH, but objectivity was taking a back seat. The new THS expressed their rationale for existence quite clearly in their preamble:

The Society promotes frank debate in an atmosphere of civility, mutual respect, and common courtesy. All we require is that participants lay down plausible premises, reason logically, appeal to evidence, and prepare for exchanges with those who hold different points of view.... where other historians can exchange ideas and contribute to each other's work. (<http://www.bu.edu/historic/about.html>).

Along this same line, there is an interesting website for History News Network from George Mason University ([hnn.us](http://hnn.us)) where historians and other bloggers try to promote “honest” history. Not all people who blog are qualified or trustworthy, but there is some substantive food for thought within the sources. This History News Network has as objec-

tives:

- To expose politicians who misrepresent history.
- To point out bogus analogies.
- To remind Americans of the irony of history.
- To put events in context.
- To remind us all of the complexity of history.

An example of exposing politicians who misrepresent history and use bogus analogies, was the treatment of Professor Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado. Information revealed that he lacked a PhD (usually required for tenure), lied about claiming to be a Native American to obtain his position, was charged with plagiarism and fraud, advocate violence against innocent civilians and called the victims of 9/11 little Nazis. Native American groups have denounced him as an imposter for years. Yet, students of the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater gave him a standing ovation when he spoke there in 2005 as a paid speaker. Of course, we always have to ask ourselves whether freedom of speech is at stake or not. Either way, a commitment to discerning “honest” history will aid us in making assessments and help us be better teachers and citizens.

### **The primary role of the church**

As called Christian church workers we see the Religious Right as well meaning, but a threat to the Church as a whole, because it lures church bodies into the political arena. Their agenda can be attractive because it denounces so many

areas of concern to us (pornography, obscenities, abortion, homosexual behavior), but history has shown how political power can detract from the mission of the church. In more recent history, one needs only look at the National Council of Churches and its political pronouncements (in this case to the left) to see how an organization can stray from the gospel ministry. Often statements released to the press by the NCC do not reflect the views of those in the pews. The Catholic clergy in some areas of Latin America became so involved in the politics of liberation theology that the common parishioners have had to become missionaries to the clergy.

Do not sacrifice the church for politics. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). For those of us in full-time kingdom work, preaching the Gospel is paramount. Everything we say and do is subordinate to bringing others to Christ. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47). The church should avoid the pitfall of seeking world power to impose our teachings on others. Preach the word of reconciliation and encourage *individual members* to freely vote their conscience – and to be good citizens. We will then provide the best for both worlds.

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# Keeping Lutheran Schools Lutheran

E. Allen Sorum

**L**UTHERAN SCHOOLS are exceedingly dear to Lutheran educators. Our most important memories, our highest joys and deepest sorrows, even our professional identities paper school walls like a first grader's art projects. Never has the ministry of a Christian elementary school been more necessary. Our Christian schools support our Christian parents in their holy duty to raise Christian children in an increasingly anti-Christian environment. Our schools cannot raise and disciple children for parents. But when a church and a school along with parents work together to raise up a new generation to follow Jesus, they create a formidable partnership. This formidable partnership is facing formidable challenges. The ministry of a Christian school has never been more necessary. It has also never been more difficult to support and administer!

The partnership formed by our Christian homes, churches and schools must continue. This partnership must endure to accomplish its purpose of evangelizing and nurturing precious souls. It can be no other way. Our Savior does not want to see any of this planet's children perish but to repent and to

come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Peter 3:9). Jesus is passionate about rescuing souls. He is passionate about rescuing every soul. Jesus is the one:

- Who invited the little children to come to him, "For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14);
- Who "had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4) because he would not allow the racist attitudes of his day keep him from rescuing a Samaritan woman and her village;
- Who allowed sinful men to nail him to a tree so the "world" would be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19);
- Who commissioned his church on earth to "Go" (Matthew 28:19) because Jesus is passionately and compassionately determined to rely on his church to deliver the message of this reconciliation to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Because it is on our Savior's heart to gather a harvest from all peoples, it is on our heart also. Through faith Christ has taken up residence in us with all of his commitments, commissions and compassion. I believe that our Christian schools are the best means by which to carry out Jesus' Great Commission—and not only in North America. Jesus is

our greatest treasure. Quality Christian education is our splendid heritage. People in darkness have long come to us so that their children could receive an excellent “private” education. These families now walk in light because our schools introduced them to an even more excellent Savior.

Now more than ever, our schools are helping us to carry out the Great Commission. Jesus told us to make disciples of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19). All nations now live right next door to us. I visited a Lutheran school in California that counted forty-one nationalities in its desks. The parents of these forty-one nationalities believed that the best way for their children to participate in the American Dream was to attend the local Lutheran school. What an opportunity! We are in the right place at the right time!

The Great Commission, however, has two parts. First, Jesus tells us to go, to evangelize, to introduce people to the Savior through our Christian witness. Then, so the root of faith can drop deep and wide and produce a harvest of a hundred fold, Jesus says, teach these disciples “to obey everything” that he has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Jesus’ goal and our goal as educators in Christian schools is to bring people over time to a sound, biblical, thoroughly Christian and unashamedly Lutheran confession.

This second part of the Great Commission, though difficult, costly, and time consuming to carry out, gives the body of Christ a spiritual backbone. Jesus wants his church to know the

truth, to believe the truth, and to proclaim the truth. We will not negotiate it, compromise it or remodel it for a fickle constituency because only the Father’s word of truth—which Jesus brought to this world so we could know the truth—can set us free (John 17:17).

The assigned theme for our consideration today is: Keeping Lutheran Schools Lutheran. What does it mean to be a Lutheran? What does it mean to you to be Lutheran? This might be a great way for a principal to start each month with his staff of Lutheran educators. Let’s review with each other and for each other exactly what it means to be Lutheran. To be Lutheran certainly means that we are followers of Christ. We care about that Great Commission. We want to give our clear witness to introduce people to Christ. We want to take the time necessary to instruct and nurture our children, converts and members in the whole Word of truth. But we are Lutheran. When we speak of the truth, we are speaking of that unconditioned gospel. We are speaking of that great truth upon which the church stands or falls. We are speaking of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the deeds of the law. We are Lutherans. When we speak of the truth, we speak by *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Sola Scriptura*. To Lutherans, the great truth that we want to teach, believe and proclaim includes the truth of the universal priesthood, the universal atonement, the active and passive obedience of Christ, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The truth is that Jesus’ body and blood is truly pre-

sent in, with, and under the bread and wine. What does it mean to be Lutheran? It means that there is this rich body of doctrine all built upon and flowing from the unconditioned gospel of Jesus. How do we Lutherans keep our schools Lutheran? We keep Lutheran by keeping our commitment to the unconditioned gospel and to the entire Word of God as our only authority, our inspired and inerrant message from God. We keep this commitment to God's Word by studying it, believing it, teaching it, living it, preaching it and loving it. It takes a Spirit-strengthened backbone to keep this commitment. God give us such a backbone!

Every body, however, and especially Christ's body on earth—the church—needs more than a backbone. If all a body has is a spine, all that body can do is sit. Jesus did not commission his body to sit. He commissioned it to go. Therefore, a body needs feet and hands, eyes, a mouth, and ears. And a body surely needs a heart, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Through these important body parts, the church carries out its ministry: proclaiming the true gospel to all the world!

We all are engaged in this ministry. It is the only ministry that God has given to his church. We do not all do it, however, in the same way. Our good deeds, fervent prayers to the Lord of the harvest, acts of love, generous giving, pursuit of justice and humble service make the "teaching about God our Savior attractive (Titus 2:10). God "prepared (our good works) in advance for us to

do" (Ephesians 2:10). So we could carry out these good works, Jesus endowed us with special gifts from the Spirit. But above all we need the Word because it fuels us and fills us with the love of Christ to do our good works (2 Corinthians 5:14).

To keep our schools Lutheran we commit to *teaching God's Word*. We will also commit to *teaching ministry*. We cannot teach ministry apart from the Word. We cannot help but teach ministry when our students study the Word. Teaching the Word provides backbone. Teaching the Word also moves hearts, legs, hands, mouth, and ears to do ministry. To keep our Lutheran schools Lutheran, we must teach the Word and we must teach ministry.

We have the backbone part right. That is to say, we are teaching God's Word faithfully and correctly. Can we say confidently, however, that we are equally committed to teaching, modeling and living Christian ministry? Today's topic gives all of us as Lutheran educators and all of us who are responsible for maintaining, promoting and celebrating Lutheran Christian schools an opportunity to evaluate our teaching of ministry. We have asked, "How do we keep our schools Lutheran?" Now, as we discuss the topic of ministry, we must ask, "Are our schools Lutheran enough?"

### **Ministry Question #1:**

*Who is responsible for determining the Lutheran-ness of our Lutheran schools?*

Private schools in the City of

Milwaukee have been invited to participate in an experiment called School Choice. One of the many concerns the leaders of Lutheran schools in Milwaukee had to struggle with before signing up for School Choice vouchers was this: What will happen to the Lutheran “culture” of our school when children from the neighborhood, who will come from a variety of religious backgrounds or no background at all, begin to fill our desks?

Who is responsible for determining the Lutheran-ness of a Lutheran school? Who sets the Lutheran tone? Who defines the Lutheran culture? Who makes sure that Lutheran commitments to the Word and to ministry are in place? Who determines Lutheran balance between law and gospel in a Lutheran classroom? Participating in the School Choice program forces Lutherans to accept the responsibility to determine Lutheran-ness. Every Lutheran school that chooses to participate in the School Choice program is given the opportunity to think through and then to make a statement to a pluralistic society that prefers to lower standards and to float with contemporary currents.

Few Lutheran schools will need to articulate their Lutheran-ness to a School Choice market. Every Lutheran school must be able to articulate its Lutheran-ness to a pluralistic world that is confused about priorities, ignorant of absolutes, and in need of our clear witness. Do we know what it means to be Lutheran? Are our schools Lutheran enough? Are we defining to all of our

stakeholders our Lutheran-ness with clarity, with passion, with conviction and with purpose? If we are, every Lutheran student and every parent of our Lutheran students will be able to tell us why they are enrolled in our Lutheran school as opposed to some other school. Can they? Will they?

Why did we prepare to become Lutheran teachers and pastors? Part of that answer has to be that we were convinced that God had given us a message to proclaim. As our society becomes more pluralistic, let us become more focused, clearer, more passionate and unashamedly Lutheran in our testimony to this society. We have the Word. We have our Lutheran commitments to this Word. Our commitment to ministry gets this Word out to the world. If the charge was made that we were a Lutheran school, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

### **Ministry Question #2:**

*Do we assume students new to our school grasp our Lutheran and Christian values or are we intentionally teaching and reviewing these values?*

WELS schools across North America are enrolling students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Our schools are enrolling children whose family structure is clearly different from what most of us experienced. Many of our new students are coming to us in the middle grades. They have spent time in a public school whose educational culture looks extremely different from ours. The adjustment for them

and for us may therefore be difficult. If our new students have not lived in a climate that requires respect, how can we expect them to be automatically respectful in our school? If their earliest education did not take place in a climate that expected them to put forth their best effort to glorify their God who entrusted them with talents and ability, how can we expect them to work hard in our school? If they have not been surrounded by friends and fellow students and teachers who all believe that education—especially a Christian education—lays a solid foundation for future opportunities, how can we expect them to show up with hope in their heart on their first day in our school? Above all, if these children have not been raised in an environment of love that flows from unconditional forgiveness from God and family members, how can we expect them to demonstrate this love?

Christian Lutheran educators possess values. We value the process of repentance that leads to peace and unity in our classrooms. We value evangelical, humble fellow servants who want to work with us for the kingdom instead of climb over for the sake of personal glory. We value excellence, work, preparing ourselves and students for future service, faithfulness, homework, and a wholesome classroom environment. We value students interacting in a Christian fashion with each other and with their teacher. This is our culture of education. We probably do not even think about our educational culture until it comes into conflict with a student who does not agree with or, more

likely, is not privy to our educational culture. Conflict is upon us! Do not assume that our new constituents understand our values. Teach the values. Show students and their families where our values come from, how these values are carried out, what these values look like in the day to day experience of a Lutheran school. But we cannot teach our values until we have identified them

*To keep our Lutheran schools Lutheran, we must teach the Word and we must teach ministry.*

and defined them for ourselves!

What values, educational and otherwise, does your staff hold near and dear? Do you all value the kind of respect that requires one child to speak at a time and when called upon? Why? Where does that value come from? Does Christian love enjoin us to not push and shove to the front of the lunch line? Where do you get that? Does God's teaching on Christian stewardship motivate us to do the very best we can with the gifts God has entrusted to our care? Do you prefer it if parents do not yell at their child's teacher in the hallway just before the school day begins? Why? Where in Scripture does one find these values taught, explained, and lived out? Show me the Bible passage! Prove that teacher intimidation is a sin that

destroys discipline in an entire school rather than an angry parent's right and duty.

In view of the times, let every principal and pastor sit down with the Lutheran elementary school staff and the board of education to discuss together their Lutheran, Christian values. What do you value? What exactly do you want your students and their families to value? Faith? Service? Servanthood? Commitment to excellence? Faithful stewardship of time, talent and treasure? Readiness to witness, to counsel and to encourage with a Lutheran balance of law and gospel? And if these are your values, where exactly do you find these values taught in the Word of God?

After we have taught our students what our core values are and where we get them and why they are precious to us, allow the students to develop out of these values the rules they think should be in place in their classroom. Yes, they will need your guidance in this process. In the end, however, they will be much more likely to obey rules they established out of a value system they share with their teacher and their fellow students. They will also be more likely to obey their rules regardless of whether you are in the room or down the hall. If we are only Lutheran in our own minds, we are not Lutheran enough.

### **Ministry Question #3:**

*How Lutheran are we when we must discipline our students?*

For reasons already touched upon, we

are involved in more discipline situations today than ever before. Also for reasons already discussed, it is more important than ever before to handle these discipline cases in a truly Lutheran style. Regardless, whether your school is in the city or in the suburbs, the discipline model that molded us is no longer broadly shared. You know the model I am referring to: "Do this because I told you to do it and if you do not do it, I will raise my voice, or, if you really test me, I will raise my paddle!" Perhaps you remember a time

*As our society becomes  
more pluralistic, let  
us become more  
focused, clearer, more  
passionate and  
unashamedly  
Lutheran in our  
testimony to this  
society.*

in your educational career when a teacher disciplined you in front of the entire class. I will never forget the time I was escorted back into class by the principal who was still holding a smoking paddle in his hand. The physical pain I experienced went away quickly. My embarrassment endured much longer.

For many reasons, this discipline

model does not work any more. The main reason corporal punishment and public shame do not work any more is that many of our children do not possess the psychological resilience to deal with it. How many children in our classrooms endure physical intimidation, yelling, cussing and public shaming in their homes, among their friends, and on the streets as a regular part of their daily routine? These children just cannot take this from one more adult whom they are supposed to honor. If we raise our voice or shame them in public, they will either lose all respect for us or consider our attack a personal challenge. They will punish us for the inappropriate way we have punished them. Inappropriate discipline models are not only counterproductive, they are not Lutheran.

It requires time. It requires patience. It requires love. It might even require additional staff. But we know how to discipline! We are Lutherans. A child in our Christian schools receives an immediate and daily instruction in the gospel. Children are invited to worship this loving Savior throughout the day in devotions, hymns and prayers. This provides the essential backdrop for all of discipline situations that will confront us on any given day. But when a child is acting out during a class, we will calmly ask him to wait until after class to explain to us why he is having trouble. If the nonsense continues, we will walk over to his desk and explain calmly that we cannot take time out right this minute to discover the issue but we will do that at the next break. If the student continues to

act out, we will remove him or have him removed from the classroom. When we do get the chance to deal with the child individually, we will point out that the sin he or she just committed was an offense against the most high God. God is not mocked. We, as representatives of that God, will not be mocked. "And when you repent of your sin against God, I will then have the distinct privilege of announcing the forgiveness of Jesus to you."

If the child does not repent, the child does not get back into the classroom. If the child refuses to repent even after Momma comes storming in, then the child and the family have to deal with the reality of suspension or, ultimately, expulsion. We preach the law until the child responds appropriately to the law. The appropriate response is, of course, repentance. We want the child to admit he did wrong and to ask for forgiveness. Life does not return to normal until the child responds appropriately to the law. Preaching the law does not include screaming or taking the child's behavior personally or public humiliation. As soon as the child responds appropriately to the law, we pour out the gospel. We forgive him. We assure him that Jesus forgives him. Many of us would hug the child. And in the words of him who really understood the balance between law and gospel, we say, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). This process does not come naturally or easily for frustrated teachers or parents. This process does take longer than barking and moralizing. But barking and moralizing never changed a

heart; it only hardens a heart. The best time to be Lutheran is when we are being tested are tried. Under these circumstances, we and our children will come to appreciate our Lutheran-ness more and more each day. Lutherans preach law and gospel. Lutherans balance law and gospel. Lutherans allow the gospel to predominate. Control over kids is not enough. Christian faith and love in kids and from kids is our mission. Are we Lutheran enough to carry out this mission?

#### Ministry Question #4:

*Do we Lutheran educators reflect the wonderful Christian joy we have because we all of our sins are forgiven and because we have been given the privilege of proclaiming this message of forgiveness to precious souls?*

Is it hard to be a teacher in a Lutheran elementary school or high school? I honestly do not know what would be more challenging. Yes it is hard! It is also stupendously important. Our world needs more of you! Our world needs to honor you, respect you and support you. You probably should not expect the world to do this, however, because the members of your own church do not do it. But Jesus honors you. O how he honors you. And he knows your pain. He knows also how to sooth your pain and lift up your spirit:

- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to

obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

- “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29).
  - “Therefore my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves full to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).
  - “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’ (Matthew 25:40).
  - “And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17).
- We have the victory. We have the comfort. We have the kingdom. Therefore, we can rejoice in the Lord always and in every situation. “Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything” (Philippians 4:4-6). Brothers and sisters, we do not carry the weight of the world upon our shoulders! Really, we do not. Nor have we been tested to the point of shedding blood. Why such a long face? Is it too late to

develop a sense of humor? No day will ever be perfect but every day is a new opportunity to see how God controls the universe for our sake! The Scriptures do not lie. God is in control.

The gospel will predominate in our teaching and our preaching and in our discipline. Please let the gospel predominate in your attitude toward the day and throughout the day! What kind of testimony are we giving to our colleagues and to our children if we insist on finding the dark cloud inside of every silver lining? Tommy Burress, a pillar leader of the congregation I served for twenty-one years, asked me this question early in my ministry: "Pastor, did they make you take a course at the seminary where they taught you to hide your emotions? I have watched you at your daughter's basketball games. You stand and shout when she makes a basket. But when it comes to God, you stand up in the pulpit and give a religious lecture. How do you expect us to get excited about God if you are not?"

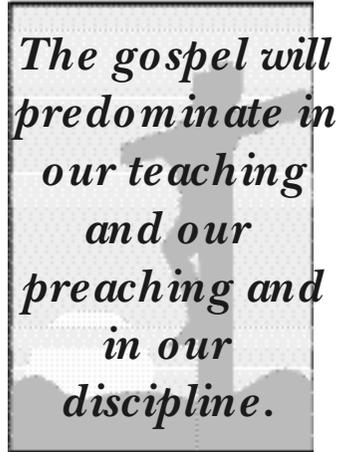
I often reflect back on my conversations with Mr. Burress and other members of his congregation, Garden Homes. We shared a challenging ministry together. There were some difficult days. But these were also exciting days filled with God's blessings, God's miracles and God's rewards of grace. We always won whatever battle we had to wage. It might have taken awhile. We might have even shed a few tears. But we always won. My time with God at Garden Homes taught me to be an optimist. My time at Garden Homes taught me to be a Lutheran.

Your time with God at your church and school has also been an awesome learning experience and privilege. It has not always been easy. But the victory is yours. You are on the winning side. If God is for us, who could be against us? "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The kingdom is yours. Show your world your joy. Tell the world of your victory. Demonstrate to your world your confidence in an awesome God. Show your world how unashamedly Lutheran you are. Show your world you are Lutheran enough and loving it!

This article was delivered at the Metro-Milwaukee Teachers' Conference in March 2005. It was revised by the author for use in *The Lutheran Educator*.

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*The gospel will  
predominate in  
our teaching  
and our  
preaching and  
in our  
discipline.*

## Confessors

Joel Kluender



**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN sued? I have. It is an experience that I would certainly wish on no one. I had recently started my first job out of college and was living in an apartment with my wife and our first child. While we were out of the apartment one day, a fire began on our deck and spread quickly through the wooden building, rendering a 75-unit building uninhabitable. It turns out, the fire started in a bag of unused charcoal which – we discovered too late – was NOT supposed to be stored on our deck. To make a long story short, we ended up being sued for around \$1,400,000 by our landlord and fellow tenants. Needless to say, when we were hauled into court to answer for ourselves, I was unbelievably nervous. Our insurance company wanted us to put the best possible spin on things. I ago-

nized over how I would do that and maintain my integrity before man and God. I did not sleep well for days prior to the hearing. In

the end, I finally realized that it was in the Lord's hands. Indeed, when the day came, I simply told the truth as it came to my mind. I discovered that honesty was, indeed, the best policy. I put it in the Lord's hands, and he delivered the strength I needed.

Martin Luther and his fellow confessors faced a similar, yet ultimately far more consequential situation when he drafted the Smalcald Articles. Luther had been asked by his prince, John Frederick, to prepare for a papal council called by Pope Paul III, to answer the claims of heresy against them. The consequence of a wrong answer in their case wasn't just a big fine, with the possibility of bankruptcy. Their very lives were on the line. Luther and his colleagues were humans with human weaknesses, just like us. Surely they felt great pressure from their Old Adam to find

ways to wordsmith their answers to avoid serious consequences, at the expense of the truth. I am quite sure that Satan was whispering such suggestions in their ears. When the rubber hit the road (or in their case, when the wood hit the cobblestone), would they stand up under the pressure? Would they, under the strain of worry, lack of sleep, and fear, falter and give a false testimony to the gospel of the Lord?

And yet, in Luther's preface to the Smalcald Articles, we see a great deal of resolve and calmness expressed. Luther says:

I have held fast to this confession until now and, by God's grace, I will continue to hold to it. What should I say? Why should I complain? I am still alive—every day I write, preach, and teach<sup>1</sup>.

To what can we attribute Luther's resolve and trust? Surely it was because he took these words of our Lord to heart:

You must be on your guard. ... On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ... Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11).

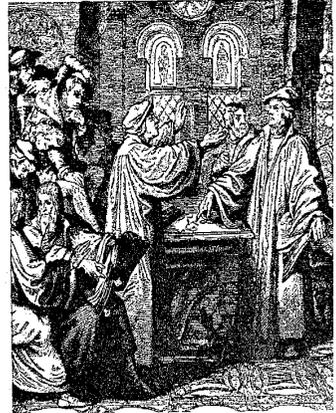
Here our Lord Jesus tells his disciples, "Don't worry!" He promises that in such situations, the Holy Spirit will speak through us to proclaim faithfully the truth of God's Word. This is great comfort! Jesus' disciples surely were embold-

ened by this promise of guidance.

Luther, likewise, rested his faith in this promise. And we, too, can put our trust in the Lord when faced with such circumstances.

Given our place in the history of God's kingdom, we might wonder when we would be in similar circumstances as Luther found himself. We live in a country where we enjoy freedom of religion, without the pressure to submit our theology to the powers that be. But suppose that

you are told by your local public school board that all students would be required to participate in



a Ramadan celebration, including prayers to Allah, in order to promote cultural diversity? What if, furthermore, the grades of those students depended on it? How would you counsel the children and families in your congregation? Would you advise them to say the prayers publicly, while silently disavowing them? God forbid, for we know that Jesus said, "Whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

I pray rather that we would point our students to Jesus' promise to give them

the Holy Spirit, to give them the words to say. Then they, like Luther, will know to trust that God himself will be our competence, and that, indeed, nothing in all of creation can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

Might we also envision a time when we ourselves are called before a court

*If ever we face such pressures, let us never look to ourselves for strength, but always look to our Lord Jesus to give us the words to be faithful witnesses for him.*

for the sake of the gospel? It is not as far fetched as it might seem. Today in the People's Republic of China, Christian pastors are tortured and imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus. They are pressured to conform to the nationalist, empty doctrines of the state-approved churches. And yet they, too, trusting in the Holy Spirit to give them words, are holding up under pressure. We should not assume that this will never happen to us. Perhaps it will be someday when we are on the foreign mission field, that Muslim extremists take us hostage and threaten us with death unless we renounce our Savior. Perhaps we will be

threatened by drug pushers who think we have been too positive an influence on their potential clientele. Maybe a court in Canada would bring hate speech charges against us for preaching Biblical morality regarding homosexuality. If ever we face such pressures, let us never look to ourselves for strength, but always look to our Lord Jesus to give us the words to be faithful witnesses for him. He will give us the grace under pressure to be faithful to him, and to boldly speak his truth before the councils of men. As Proverbs 3:5 exhorts us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

As Luther prayed, so we pray:

O dear Lord Jesus Christ ... Help us who are poor and miserable, who sigh to you and earnestly seek you, according to the grace you have given us through your Holy Spirit, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, forever praised.

Amen<sup>2</sup> ✠

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kolb, R., T. Wengert and C.P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 300.

# Luther, Faithful Servant of Holy Scripture

Theodore Hartwig

**I**N THE CHRISTIAN WORLD there are and always have been two pairs of contrary ways of thinking. The first pair comprises opposing paths to God; the single, indivisible way of grace through faith vis-à-vis fifty-seven variant ways by human works. The second pair embraces opposing approaches to God's word. These are the intellectual and the evangelical, evangelical in the historic Lutheran sense. The first pair should require no elucidation for Lutheran readers well versed in the polarity between grace and works. If by grace, then it is no longer by works; and if by works, then it is no longer by grace. The two remain eternally opposed to each other. As for the second pair, intellectual versus evangelical, this is another matter.

It is entirely possible for intellectualism to be vigorously defensive of salvation by grace. It can sincerely advocate doctrinal purity. It can focus heavily on having the right idea of a truth, less on possessing the truth itself. Intellectualism concerns knowledge and judgment, though not necessarily wisdom, and results from the thinking process in our mind. As such, it belongs to the elements of this world. It is one of the divine gifts by which we maintain ourselves in this world and carry out

God's directive to master the marvels of his creation and be good stewards thereof. However, our thinking process, crippled and corrupted by sin, cannot serve as the avenue whereby God draws us to himself and whereby we come to love him and live in his word. Nor is it the means by which God's truths are most naturally and effectively presented to hearers. In championing God's truths, the intellectual may also be ensnared by religious externals, strong on form and rule but weak on giving expression to faith of the kind which warms the heart.

The evangelical way, by contrast, approaches God's word as it is in the simple, natural forms whereby it pleased God to reveal his truths in the Bible. It does not impose on them the organization and harmonization dear to the intellect but, accepting these truths as they are in their natural context, it rejoices in them as precious gifts from the Lord. Furthermore, the evangelical way comes to Holy Scripture always in, with, and through the Lord Jesus Christ. It puts Christ at the center of its study and interpretation. Here lies the crucial difference between the evangelical way and fundamentalism. The fundamentalist accepts Scripture as an intellectually satisfying, infallible divine revelation. The evangelical comes to Scripture with Christ. He accepts God's word as he

accepts Christ, both under the shadow of the cross. His theology or God-wisdom is Luther's theology of the cross. He recognizes in Scripture as in Christ the offense of the gospel. Christ is God and man in one person. Even so Scripture, all of it, is a unity of God's word and man's word, the infallible source of all we need to believe and trust. On the other hand, with his unflinching confidence in Scripture as God's word, the fundamentalist becomes ensnared in an intellectually appealing idea of inspiration. Contrariwise, the evangelical, with child-like faith in the Lord Jesus, accepts, trusts, and uses Scripture, all of it, as the Bread of Life. Fundamentalism is native to Calvin's theology in the Reformed churches, as most visible in the teaching of double election and the Lord's Supper. Evangelical theology is the benchmark of genuine, Luther-inherited Lutheranism.

Thus Luther shall be our source for getting a handle on, cherishing, and applying for ourselves the evangelical understanding and use of Scripture; and this is done not by examining what has been written about Luther but by investigating his own writings, especially the Small Catechism, his liturgical works and hymns, as well as his sermons, letters, and Bible interpretations. From these we get to know

1. his servant manner of presenting God's word;
2. his servant way of approaching God's word;
3. his servant freedom under God's word.

### **The servant's presentation of God's word**

From Luther's well known catechisms and chorales, we surely have come to appreciate his unparalleled and child-like way of presenting God's truths. The uniqueness of this presentation, however, may be clouded by its being taken for granted. But the clouds are dispelled when contrasts are brought into view. On that memorable December 10, 1520, when Luther joined faculty and student body at a bonfire outside Wittenberg's city gate, more than the pope's bull threatening excommunication was consumed in the flames. For good measure, and far more significantly, the fire was fed with the mass of past church doctrine and church law, that is, the Roman Catholic constitution together with the theological tomes intellectually organized in a religious system as described earlier. Crowned by the halo of tradition, these tomes were the popular way for teaching divine truth. It was a method compatible to the human mind, wherewith the mind functions most naturally and efficiently. In the kingdom of God, however, efficiency and effectiveness are not always synonymous.

Unlike the medieval theologians before him and Calvin after him, Luther was not a systematizer. By far the greatest share of his labors with Scripture were an exposition of God's word book by book, story by story, truth by truth, as a proclamation of sin and grace. With his students he examined the Bible as it is, in the form it was revealed as stories,

testimonies, events, records of God's dealing with sinful mankind. For Luther, Scripture's teaching was a message, a sermon and song, not a system.

Luther's style extended beyond classroom work. He stands alone among the reformers in recognizing the need to bring the Bible as it is to the people. This impelled him to the extraordinary task of Bible translation. It produced also the related fruits of his hymns and the catechisms. These latter flowerets are not expositions of religious systems. Rather, they are proclamations, prayers, praises, and thanksgivings aimed at the heart, and the more one systematizes these exquisite flowerets and breaks them apart petal by petal, the greater the danger of losing their fragrance and their heartwarming beauty.

To demonstrate with an example, Luther's explanation to the Lord's Prayer Introduction catches its purpose so well. What does "Our Father in heaven" mean? Luther responds with a brief, simple, childlike answer. It is a little classic which focuses on Our Father. The explanation might have gone in more directions, to study the word "heaven," its various names, its nature, its joys, all correct and interest-catching, until one wakes up to the fact that in this prayer context, such information, speaking to the intellect, does not edify nor warm the heart. There is a time and place for treatments of heaven, but in a different context.

Another example of Luther's method comes to light when comparing his "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" (CW 377) with "Salvation unto Us Has

Come" (CW 390) composed by Luther's contemporary, Paul Speratus. Both hymns are superb gifts of the Reformation. Both present the cardinal Bible teaching of salvation by grace. Luther does it in the form of a story, the gospel as it is. Speratus as a doctrinal exposition.

Thus Luther's stanza 2:

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,  
Death brooded darkly o'er me,  
Sin was my torment night and day,  
In sin my mother bore me;  
Yet deep and deeper still I fell,  
Life had become a living hell,  
So firmly sin possessed me.

And Speratus's stanza 3:

It is a false, misleading dream  
That God his law has given  
That sinners could themselves redeem  
And by their works gain heaven.  
The law is but a mirror bright  
To bring the inbred sin to light  
That lurks within our nature.

Though Luther was not given to systemizing, it does not mean that he denigrated system and organization. When young colleague Melancthon wrote the *Loci Communis* (Commonplaces), the first presentation in the Lutheran Church of organized Bible teaching, Luther rejoiced. Perhaps somewhat extravagantly, he rated this work as one of the supreme gifts of the Reformation. And this kind of Bible presentation has its proper place in Lutheran education. It is a wholesome and necessary discipline for those who will be public teachers and preachers of God's word. It is an excellent discipline for clarifying divine truths, as the above Speratus stanza

demonstrates. But our focus now is on Luther's way of teaching in the manner corresponding with God's word as it is. Luther's way is our unique heritage, and we do well to understand it, cherish it, and emulate it.

### **The servant's way of approaching God's Word**

Two points need emphasis here. The first is Luther's Christ-centered understanding of God's Word. The other is his childlike acceptance of God's word. His approach to Scripture is Christ-centered. Very bluntly he wrote to his opponent, Erasmus of Rotterdam: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find left in them?" By this he meant that if Bible investigation is not carried out in the context of Christ, the result is distraction. Without Christ in the forefront and without faith in Christ, Bible study reverts to an exchange of pious thoughts. With his focus on Christ, Luther, furthermore, gives special emphasis to the humanity of Jesus. One meets it best in his Christmas sermons. His portrayals of the infant Jesus as a true baby are vivid and realistic. Quoting from Roland Bainton's exquisitely reproduced Martin Luther Christmas Book, Luther writes in the Nativity section:

The guests swarming in the inn were carousing, and no one attended to this woman. . . . And now think what she could use for swaddling clothes — some garment she could spare, perhaps her veil, — certainly not Joseph's breeches,

which are now on exhibition at Aachen [near the Rhine River]. . . . Those who say that Mary was not a real mother lose all the joy. He was a true baby, with flesh, blood, hands, and legs. He slept, cried, and did everything else that a baby does, only without sin.

Let us then meditate upon the nativity just as we see it happen in our own babies. I would not have you contemplate the deity of Christ, but rather his flesh. . . . To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to this gurgling babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save.

Luther was not offended by the paradox that this infant Jesus is also the very God. Faith overleaps obstacles proposed by the human intellect, rejoices in the revelation of the God-man, and receives the mystery as a little child.

Such is his childlike approach to God's word. He was familiar with problems in the Bible text, met them head on, and dealt with them freely and frankly. The problem of sixty lost years in Abram's history is a case in point. When comparing Bible passages in Genesis 11:26-32 and Acts 7:4, which tell of Abram's move to Canaan, one meets with the conundrum of sixty lost years. According to Acts, Abram moved to Canaan after his father died. According

to Genesis, his father died sixty years after Abram moved to Canaan. Here, our interest lies only with Luther's treatment of the puzzle (Lectures on Genesis, LW 2:238-239). First, he did not sweep the problem under the carpet. Second, he discussed it with his students. Third, he did not employ the escape device of a probable copyist's error. Fourth, he made no attempt to harmonize the conflict in a manner satisfactory to the intellect. Rather, he let the problem stand without trying to resolve it. "As far as I am concerned," he says, "I do not know what I should answer to a problem of this kind. And so I conclude with a humble confession of my ignorance."

### **The servant's freedom under God's Word**

Because of his Christ-centered, childlike approach to Scripture, Luther also enjoyed a freedom under the Word which may not be attuned to some contemporary kinds of thinking. In the well-known letter to his firstborn Hans, Luther describes heaven in a manner that would appeal to a four year old, but is not to be found in the Bible. A purist might call this unwarranted license. Whether license or not, Luther's description catches the spirit of portrayals, for example, in Isaiah 35 and Revelation 21. But Luther's freedom may pass the critic's censorship this time, for being hallowed by long familiarity with the letter. What of other cases? Luther calls it an apple which Eve ate, and he does not quibble over the

number of magi from the east. The number three had also become a tradition, so, Luther says, "the simple have it so." Don't make it into an issue that may do more harm than good. Self-evidently, we can exceed moderation by dressing up Bible stories with non-biblical trivia. Yet one can also become so rigorous with rules about precision that rigorism drains life out of the Bible story. Slipshod treatment of these stories secularizes them and leads to loss of reverence. Rigorous attitudes, contrariwise, are often the stepchild of intellectualism and do not warm the heart. Therefore let evangelical common sense be the guideline – moderation in all things.

Shall we criticize the universal practice of artists in the Middle Ages to picture Bible people and places in medieval garb and environment? Was Luther's contemporary, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, exhibiting unwarranted license when he painted Herod's soldiers slaying Bethlehem's infants as the red-coated Spanish soldiers who were terrorizing Brueghel's Netherlands? Is it demeaning to picture Jesus in blue jeans? Luther would approve of these freedoms. Moreover, such art is a powerful means for bringing Bible truths into contemporary life. What happened in the past happens today and can be taught both orally and visually.

Wide and deep reading into Luther's works often brings to light unusual expressions of his freedom under God's word. Trying to sift the wheat from the chaff will not necessarily persuade the sifter that much of what Luther said or

wrote does not merit serious thought and will not pass muster. The man is not separated from himself so easily. His amazing freedom under the gospel, fruit of childlike faith, was so deeply imbedded in him that it defies being torn away. The problem is not with Luther's freedom but with the historical fact that as the external ecclesiastical organization grows older, larger, and more comfortable, religious life, thought, and theology tend to become more intellectual and stereotyped.

Luther exhibited his freedom also with the literature, science, art, and history received from the world at large. His attitude toward this inheritance was refreshingly different from some other influential men of the church. Consider these views of a prominent church leader in the sixth century, who was highly influential in setting the tone of doctrine and practice over the next millennium. In a letter to a fellow pastor, he writes:

It has come to our attention that you, dear Brother, have been holding conferences in ancient literature. This information we received with reluctance and vehemently rejected. . . . Wherefore if the report that has come to us later prove manifestly false and if it be certain that you do not devote yourself to frivolities of secular letters, we shall render thanks to our God (NPNF, Part 2, Vol..XIII, Epistle 54).

The writer may have had valid reasons for penning these lines to a particular person at a particular place. We neither

commend nor correct him, but with benefit of hindsight we should be aware of the impact his authoritative posture had on future generations. It bore much bitter fruit. So let the initiator be warned.

Luther broke away from such tunnel vision because he had tasted true freedom under the gospel. He expresses his thoughts about secular works and wisdom in a letter to the aldermen of Germany in behalf of establishing Christian schools. At the letter's close, he comes to libraries and books to be included in them. Besides the Bible and other religious works, he recommends the following:

Then, books that would be helpful in learning the languages, such as poets and orators, regardless of whether they were pagan or Christian. . . . After that would come books on the liberal arts, and all other arts. . . . Among the foremost would be the chronicles and histories, in whatever languages they are to be had. For they are a wonderful help in understanding and guiding the course of events, and especially for observing the marvelous works of God (LW 45:376).

If we parents, teachers, and pastors desire to preserve our heritage from Luther, we need to understand what his freedom under the gospel really is. We need not shun good literature and learning produced by the world. At the children's level there are tales, fables, myths, and folklore worthy of becoming part of a child's treasury of knowledge. For religious education, Luther's hymns

deserve time and attention. As for Luther's crown jewel, the Small Catechism — he rated it above all his other popular works as perhaps alone worthy of preservation — this suggestion: Instead of treating it with multitudinous reasoned, verging-on-tedious elaboration as a religious system, let it be taught as a heartwarming song and prayer which incomparably summarizes what great things God has done for us, whereof we are glad. See the Ten Commandments suspended like pearls from their Christ-centered Introduction, "I am the LORD, your God." Without this, the Commandments lose their power and perfume. And let each petition of the Lord's Prayer effervesce from its Christ-centered Introduction, "Our Father in heaven," because, Jesus says, "no one comes to the Father except through me." So also Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Creed. Away with intellectual exercise for the children and let these three be taught as they are in the Catechism text, songs from the heart aimed to the heart.

Above all, apply the regimen of the Bible as is to its history. Let Bible history stand at the beginning of all teaching and then present the stories in a connected whole, the story of salvation. Whether in New Testament or Old, tell the story with Christ at the center of its lesson. Tell it as a teacher who by faith in Jesus had learned the art of becoming a little child. Then we are putting Scripture as it is to use for our own benefit and for the benefit of those we serve. We are making the most of our

precious heritage from Luther.

To recognize Luther's nature as a Christian child describes best his presentation of God's word, his approach to God's word, and his freedom under God's word. Paradoxically, this also accounts for both the profundity and the simplicity of his thought. Scripture has been likened to a river in which an elephant can drown and through which a little tot can wade. Like a tot, Luther waded through the river and, while mining like a giant from its profound depths, he yet had the knack for entrancing little children to enjoy its refreshing shallows with him. In his German Mass of 1526, he instructs parents and teachers to practice the art of wading through the river as follows:

[Let us lead the heart to] grasp the whole sum of Christian truth under two headings or, as it were, in two pouches, namely, faith and love. Faith's pouch may have two pockets. Into the one pocket we put the part that believes that through the sin of Adam we are all corrupt, sinners, and under condemnation. . . . Into the other we put the part that through Jesus Christ we all are redeemed from this corruption, sin, and condemnation. ... Love's pouch may also have two pockets. Into the one put this piece, that we should serve and do good to everyone, even as Christ has done for us. Into the other put this piece, that we should gladly endure and suffer all kinds of evil. ... Let faith's pouch be for the gulden ... {and} let love's pouch be for the silver.

And let no man think himself too wise for such child's play. Christ, to train men, had to become man himself. If we wish to train children, we must become children with them. Would to God such child's play were widely practiced. In a short time we would have a wealth of Christian people whose souls would be so enriched in Scripture and in the knowledge of God that of their own accord they would add more pockets (LW 53:66-67).

With children, the game's the thing

and might be employed right to the upper years in high school. The game impacts primarily the heart, then secondarily the intellect. And when the heart is won, the learning experience becomes less of a chore, more of a delight. To say it once more, Scripture's story, come to us from a loving, divine heart, is aimed directly and totally at our human heart. ✠

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## REVIEWS

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Concordia: *The Lutheran Confessions. A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord.*

Paul T. McCain, Robert C. Baker, Gen E. Veith, and Edward A. Albrecht, translators and editors. St. Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005. 763 pages, hardcover, illustrations, indexes. \$29.99 retail; \$20 special online price.

"When Concordia Publishing House released *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* in June of 2005, the volume was widely anticipated, vigorously promoted, and quickly distributed. ... The first printing of 40,000 copies sold out within about four months."<sup>1</sup>

I may have had a small role in gener-

ating a few of those sales. At the time, I was leading a church Bible class on emphases of the Augsburg Confession. Noting the very affordable price of the newly released CPH book, I told parishioners it would make a much better item for gift-giving at Christmas than the traditional fruitcake.

That lighthearted sales pitch came before any serious examination of the edition, however. Problems with the recipe used to produce *Concordia – A Reader's Edition* have become evident. Unwise translating and editing choices have been detailed by John Brug in the Winter 2006 issue of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.<sup>2</sup> Many of Dr. Brug's complaints have been echoed in a 15-page report issued by the Lutheran Church-

Missouri Synod Commission on Doctrinal Review. The review panel “identified lapses in sound historical scholarship, ambiguous or questionable doctrinal statements and explanations, unexplained peculiarities in the translation, and (perhaps most seriously) a general failure to distinguish clearly between what is actually the text of the Confessions and all other non-confessional material.”<sup>3</sup> One of the key areas of doctrinal difficulty noted in the new translation is “a bias in favor of a strong emphasis on clergy authority.”<sup>4</sup>

Because the Lutheran confessions occupy a more prominent place than other church publications, a special course of action has been taken by the LCMS and CPH. LCMS president Gerald Kieschnick and CPH Board of Directors chairman Robert Knox have issued a joint statement, informing readers that the Commission on Doctrinal Review has revoked the book’s doctrinal certification.<sup>5</sup> CPH is working with the LCMS Commission on Doctrinal Review to prepare an amended and revised second edition of *Concordia – A Reader’s Edition*. They also promise to make available “a supplement containing important revisions that should be inserted in or attached to the first edition,”<sup>6</sup> for the sake of those who already purchased the volume.

According to the CPH website, the new edition of *Concordia – A Reader’s Edition* is slated for release on November 30, 2006. However, the same site carries this disclaimer: “The nature of the changes we are presently making ... require more time than originally

anticipated. We will deliver this revised edition as soon as we are able.”<sup>7</sup> So, at the time of this writing, it is a bit unclear when to expect completion of the reworked book. Hopefully, it will be worth the wait and will provide an affordable and reliable edition of the Lutheran confessions for lay readers, avoiding the ingredients that left a bit of an aftertaste of fruitcake. [John Brug follows the “strange, sad story” of how this controversy is being handled within LCMS in the Spring 2006 issue of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*

There has been a spate of confessional publishing in recent years. Fortress Press produced a new English translation of *The Book of Concord* 2000, an edition which has been adopted for use at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College. We are glad to see this sort of interest in the confessional heritage of the Lutheran church.

In this writer’s opinion, there is a need not yet met by these new editions of the Book of Concord. While *Concordia – A Reader’s Edition* aimed at getting laity engaged in reading the confessions, I wonder whether most lay members will pick up a 700+ page book. We’d be glad if more members would read their Bibles regularly; having them pursue “A Book of Concord Reading Guide”<sup>8</sup> regimen as well is ambitious. Use of these full, unabridged editions is advisable for our church councils and studious members, but something more streamlined would help acquaint a wider array of our members with the contents of our confessions. I would like to see work done to produce an

abridged edition of the Book of Concord, packaged in a way more accessible for casual reading, book club discussions, youth group retreats and the like. I suppose some would object to this suggestion, thinking it a dumbing-down or minimizing of our confessional heritage. However, as an entry-level introduction to the Lutheran confessions, I could see a paperback, condensed edition as an extremely beneficial tool. ♣

DDS

**FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> LCMS Commission on Doctrinal Review, “Decision regarding challenges filed against Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. A Readers Edition (CPH, 2005)” <<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media>

<<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/Doctrinal%20Review/Concordia%20decision.pdf>> (18 June 2006), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Brug, “Reviewer’s Desk,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 103:1 (Winter 2006): 65-70.

<sup>3</sup> “Decision regarding challenges,” p.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.14. See also Brug, *WLQ*, p.67-69.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald B. Kieschnick and Robert M. Knox, “Joint Statement Regarding Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions,” March 16, 2006 <<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=9679>> (18 June 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Concordia Publishing House <<http://www.cph.org/cphstore>> (18 June 2006).

<sup>8</sup> *Concordia – A Reader’s Edition* 19-22.