

Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 11

4-15-2019

Grapho 2019

Jordan Voges

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, revgslc@warwick.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Voges, Jordan (2019) "Grapho 2019," *Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho/vol2/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.



GRAPHO

CONCORDIA SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL





GRAPHO

CONCORDIA SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL

Essays	<i>"I still feel - kind of temporary about myself"</i>	7
	<i>Trevor Freudenberg</i>	
	<i>Texts of Faith in Times of Tragedy</i>	20
	<i>Ryan Anderson</i>	
Essays	<i>Walther on Confessional Agreement and Church Fellowship</i>	31
	<i>Christian Einertson</i>	
	<i>Historical Deficiencies and Present Needs</i>	42
	<i>Jordan R. Voges</i>	
Poetry	<i>Luther's Small Haiku</i>	55
	<i>Jaron Melin</i>	
	<i>No. 1451, Groaning</i>	56
	<i>Garrick (Ricky) Sinclair Beckett</i>	
Poetry	<i>Tryptich of Hymns on the Reign</i>	58
	<i>Kyle Ronchetto</i>	
	<i>Burying Jeremiah</i>	63
Narrative	<i>Adelphos Mikroteros</i>	
	<i>Funerals</i>	71
Opinion	<i>Rev. Joshua H. Jones</i>	
	<i>How Embodied Human Creatures Converse... Online</i>	81
	<i>David Edwards</i>	

**Student Publications
Committee Members**

Ryan Anderson
Kendall Davis
Christian Dollar
Luke Elowsky
Andrew Hatesohl
Andrew Lehenbauer
Nils Niemeier
Ahren Reiter
Donald Stein
Mason Vieth
Luke Watt

Chairman

Jordan R. Voges

Graphic Designer

Alyson Ruffatto

The Student Publications Committee would also like to offer a special thanks to Concordia Seminary's staff from Creative Services and Publications for their help and guidance in bringing this project to fruition.

Essays

“I still feel - kind of temporary about myself”: Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and the Search for an Everlasting Name

Trevor Freudenberg

Introduction: Alexa and the Problem of Modern Identity Making

Meet Alexa. Not the ubiquitous digital assistant, but an individual in the process of crafting an identity for herself. Alexa Abraham is a 24-year-old woman living in London who defines herself as an ‘influencer.’ A recent article in *1843 Magazine* details how Alexa has created this identity of ‘influencer’ using social media, especially Instagram. Yet she feels a certain pressure with the growth of her influence:

... it’s nerve-racking. She used to post whatever she liked without thinking about it but now she’ll post something and be like, ‘uuugh, is that a good idea?’ and sit there anxiously waiting for comments. It’s important not to say the wrong thing or to upset a prominent influencer because they could easily ruin your career.¹

Alexa’s story is a common one for millennials and others who are in the process of creating an identity on and through social media. This identity, in Alexa’s case as an influencer, is often directly tied to their financial fortunes in an increasingly shifting economy.² In Alexa’s case, technology has given her a somewhat fragile identity, one liable to mockery from internet keyboard warriors. In a certain sense, the growth of technology has even taken away her name, one of the foundational parts of her identity: “She shares her name with Amazon’s virtual assistant, a coincidence that once made her cry when she discovered that the only reason her boss had hired her was because she liked the idea of having a real-life Alexa to order about.”³ Yet Alexa does not complain: this is simply the reality and the struggle for millennials trying to make a name for themselves today.

It is tempting to place the blame for Alexa’s anxiety upon technology. Instagram invites her to create and recreate her identity with every picture. It also facilitates direct, anxiety-inducing feedback on the creation of that identity. But technology only exacerbates what has long been an issue: the making of the modern identity. Modern man conceives of his identity in fundamentally self-made, internal,

and often economic categories. Charles Taylor, in his 1989 work *Sources of the Self*, articulates the modern idea of identity, tracing "...senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality..."⁴ that are at work throughout the history of identity-making. Moderns conceive of their identity in self-focused ways. Taylor demonstrates how various thinkers, such as St. Augustine and John Locke, articulated a vision of man's identity which is essentially interior, regardless of whether that interiority is of a soul or a reasoning mind. External markers of identity such as wealth or relationships are only signs of the interior – perhaps the interior character or reason of man which allows him to succeed in business.

One work that illustrates many of the problems in the making of a modern, interior identity is Arthur Miller's 1949 drama *Death of a Salesman*. In the play, Willy Loman is an exhausted, 60-year-old salesman who is frustrated at work and home. Like Alexa, he struggles with his identity, only instead of quantifying his identity in terms of Instagram followers and influence, Willy tries to make a name for himself in terms of his own financial success as well as that of his two sons, Biff and Happy. He is mentally fragile – shifting between past and present, as his past negative memories harm his present identity. Throughout the play, Miller criticizes the Western notion that we, as individuals, have the power to craft our own identities through successful careers or family relationships. The play ends with Willy's funeral and without a clear-cut answer to the question of how best to conceive of modern identity. A critical analysis of *Death of a Salesman* demonstrates that Willy Loman is continually in the process of self-authorship, attempting to create an identity for himself in his career as a salesman. This is primarily a process of his own mental self-understanding. Undermining this cultural narrative of modern identity making opens the door for the church to more fully proclaim the Christian identity in all cultures and places, that is, the everlasting name of Jesus that is placed upon us in baptism.

Miller, The Theatre Industry, and the Creation of Salesman

In crafting *Death of a Salesman*, Miller utilizes the theatrical conventions of both realist theatre and expressionist theatre to portray Willy Loman as a type of everyman, someone engaged in the universal struggle to craft his own identity and make a name for himself before others. Realism portrays life as we see it, whereas expressionism allows us to enter more fully into the internal world of characters. This artistic shift in Miller's own body of work– from a strict realism seen in *All My Sons* which portrayed individual characters in everyday environments, to expressionism which sought to show the inner workings and life of the characters, is what allows Miller to uniquely portray Willy Loman as a universal every-man, an 'Adam' as Miller calls him, wanting to 'name' himself and everything around him.⁵ This shift also

takes place materially in the production of *Salesman*, which brings the audience into Loman's interior life and allows us to see how his struggle with his past forms his present self.

Death of a Salesman marks a shift away from realism, even in the corpus of Miller himself. Theatrical realism is most commonly associated with the work of Henrik Ibsen. In his play *Hedda Gabler*, the titular protagonist is not a stand-in for the experience of every person, but an individual with her own personal conflict. Her suicide at the end of the play is not caused by discontent of the human condition in general but rather her specific circumstances – in a loveless marriage, seething with jealousy over the recovery of her ex-lover.⁶ Materially, realistic sets often imitated real locales in minute detail, simply absent one wall. Directly before *Salesman*, Miller wrote in this tradition. While today, due to the prevalence of television sitcoms and dramas which are typically realist, realism was a definite shift in the history of theatre, followed by an equally strong shift away from realism towards expressionism and other forms of theatre.

When the landscape began to shift in the American theatrical scene, Miller followed. In Miller's autobiography, he references the importance of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Miller writes, "*Streetcar* – opened one specific door for me. Not the story or characters or the direction, but the words and their liberation, the joy of the writer in writing them..."⁷ As opposed to strictly realist theatre, in which the characters and the story are primary, Williams' plays allow Miller to use a different kind of poetics, a more universal language. The salesman of the play, Willy Loman, can use poetic language and cadence to portray an archetype for the universal man. It is not Willy's words that he speaks, but *our* words, a poetic expression of our inner hopes and desires. It is in the context of the discussion Williams' language that Miller makes a critical comment about Willy Loman and his self-creation, authoring an identity: "With *Streetcar*, Tennessee had printed a license to speak at full throat, and it helped strengthen me as I turned to Willy Loman, a salesman always full of words, and better yet, a man who *could never cease trying, like Adam, to name himself* and the world's wonder."⁸ In a realist drama, characters are so unique that they cannot truly stand in for general life experience. Moving away from strict realism allows Miller to position Willy as an everyman, akin to the first man and every man since in his need to understand and name his own identity in relationship to the external world.

Miller also notes the importance of another playwright in enabling him to posit Willy as an everyman, Thornton Wilder. In an essay entitled *The Family in Modern Drama*, Miller describes Wilder's *Our Town*: "Unlike Ibsen, Wilder sees his

characters in this play not primarily as personalities, as individuals, but as forces, and he individualizes them only enough to carry the freight, so to speak, of their role as forces.”⁹ Like Williams’ use of language, Wilder’s characterizations in *Our Town* help Miller to construct Loman as an everyman more than an individual character. Moving beyond the text of the plays themselves, both *Our Town* and *Death of a Salesman* reflect this understanding materially, moving away from realistic sets and utilizing certain elements of early 20th century expressionistic theatre to provide broader characters.

The setting of Wilder’s *Our Town* begins to utilize certain elements of expressionism. Expressionism is a term that first applies to the visual arts to describe the shift of van Gogh and others from impressionism. While the impressionists sought to capture objects at a certain point in time and space, expressionists, “...tried to stress strong inner feelings about objects and to present life *as modified or distorted by the painter’s own vision of reality*.”¹⁰ This attempt, to show an inner life and demonstrate how that inner life often alters one’s view of reality, came to prominence in the early 20th century. Speaking of Wilder’s set, which would emphasize many of these elements, Miller writes, “A real set would only discomfit us by drawing attention to what would then appear to be a slightly unearthly quality about the characterizations.”¹¹ In order for Wilder’s characters to speak as forces, they must be accompanied by the appropriate setting that allows us to enter into their inner life and see reality from their point of view. In *Our Town*, the two young lovers George and Emily stand on ladders as they converse on an otherwise bare stage. Every element of the set exists to help us enter the world of the characters, as opposed to a realist set in which much of the staging is simply window dressing to more fully imitate life.

The expressionist elements in the setting of *Death of a Salesman* also allow us to enter Loman’s world in a way that realism could not. In a later interview, Miller reveals his initial intention for the play: “I was originally gonna call it ‘Inside of His Head.’ That was at a time when I thought of staging it where the curtain would go up, and you’d see the interior of the skull. And they would be walking around inside of him, all these people.”¹² Miller desires to have the audience enter and observe Loman’s mind. While this did not happen directly, some of these initial thoughts come out in how the setting of the play enables us to see how Loman struggles to distinguish, in his inner life, between the past and the present, and how this affects his identity.

In addition to positing Loman as an everyman using the staging, Miller also demonstrates one key aspect of Loman’s failure to establish a working identity,

his inability to distinguish between past and present. Commenting upon realism, Miller notes, “I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism, and for one integral reason: in Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes *even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind*.”¹³ This is reflected both in Loman’s words and in Miller’s directions for staging, which he describes in the text of *Salesman*: “Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the ordinary wall-lines...But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken.”¹⁴ The staging, showing us Loman’s interior mind, also visibly demonstrates his struggle to posit a current identity in the face of intruding past memories.

Utilizing elements of both realism and expressionism allows Miller to portray Loman as a sort of everyman in search of an identity. He is more than a mere character – he is all of us in his attempt to name and understand himself in relationship to the world around him. Yet Loman has a unique challenge – his past continually intrudes into his present, overwhelming his mind and ruining his attempt to name himself. We have established that Loman is an everyman in search of a name, but what are the unique pressures and constraints which he faces?

The Text of Salesman: Discourses of Family and Business

America is the land of the self-made man, where men and women are free to create themselves. Our children are told that they can become whatever they wish as we are continually implored to craft our own narrative and identity. *Salesman* attacks this cultural mythology but also broadens it to the universal, human struggle to forge our own identities in the face of various pressures and constraints. A discursive analysis of *Salesman* shows that Miller focuses upon two main areas which constrain Loman and cause him to shape his identity around their own values: business and the family. By focusing upon business and family, *Salesman* attacks a specifically Western, capitalistic mythology of career as identity as well as a universal human struggle. While the signs of success – wealth and relationships – are external, the real struggle to formulate an identity takes place within Willy’s mental world.

Given that Miller initially thought the play would take place inside Loman’s head, the initial stage direction takes on a new significance: “Before us is the SALESMAN’S house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding all sides...As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home.”¹⁵ If we take the home to be the inside of Loman’s head, Miller describes it as ‘small’ and ‘fragile-seeming.’ We will discuss the semiotics of the urban development which surrounds and oppresses

Loman below. For now, it is most important to note Loman's fragility and the oppression behind him.

This oppression comes not only in the increasing urbanization, but in the pressures of business and family, pressures to be 'successful,' a self-made man of wealth. In Loman's mind, as he flirts with the boundary between past and present, he encounters his brother Ben, a key figure because he is both a family member as well as a successful businessman. Ben says to Willy, "William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out, I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!"¹⁶ In this scene, Ben does not give a reason or method for success. It is left to Willy to figure it out and find similar success. The goal is given, namely riches, but Ben provides no path, only to 'walk into the jungle.' What's more, Willy not only desires to replicate Ben, but to pass this ideal of wealth along to his two boys, Happy and Biff, "That's just the spirit I want to imbue them with!"¹⁷ The positive example of his brother Ben already puts a crushing pressure to succeed on Willy, a pressure he passes on to his two sons. In contrast to Ben, Willy struggles to pay routine bills: "A hundred and twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!"¹⁸ Loman continually expresses his regret that he did not live up to his brother: "God! Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! What a mistake!"¹⁹ Ben's example continually constrains Willy and forces him to craft his own identity of financial success.

Willy's father provides an important example of the need to create one's own identity and be self-reliant. Willy notes, "Oh, yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family."²⁰ This discourse sets an important expectation for Willy, namely self-reliance, that he can never really achieve. Both Ben and his father, especially, in their boldness in going to Alaska, set standards that Willy cannot accomplish, constraining the creation of his identity in such a way that he cannot successfully create his own identity. Willy's attempts at self-authorship and self-understanding routinely fail, in part because of his own conflicted mind and contradicted self. While the discursive field of his father and brother set a standard that Willy cannot achieve, it is in his work as a salesman where we see the conflict to create an identity and 'name' himself most clearly.

In the very first dream sequence, when we see most clearly the conflict within Willy's mind and his inability to separate his past from his present and constitute an identity for himself, Willy expresses both confidence and insecurity in his role as a salesman: "Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm

very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me."²¹ He first posits a positive identity as a salesman, someone well liked and respected, but then doubt immediately enters and questions that identity. We can make greater sense of this juxtaposition in a theatrical production, as performance enhances the poetics of the text, a concept which Miller discusses in connection with Tennessee Williams. Willy cannot articulate his identity to himself, let alone directly before the pressure of his boss when asking to come off the road. In making this request, Willy continually mentions his past sales numbers: "I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928!"²² After his boss leaves, Willy believes that he sees Frank, his old boss. His present identity being a failure to himself, and in the face of crushing familial and business pressure, he resorts to the false reality of his former identity and previous modest success. He soon wakes up to the truth.

In the face of these crushing pressures, the West, and Alaska in particular, stands out as a key symbol of hope, an opportunity to escape the economic pressures of the rapidly growing city. Remember that the very first stage direction emphasized the looming apartment complexes which suffocate the Loman house (and Willy's mind). Throughout the play, Willy complains about urbanization: "The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses."²³ Throughout the play, as seen in the examples of Ben going to Alaska, the West signifies a chance to be free from the confinement of the city, an opportunity to get away from the endless buying and selling and to do something with one's hands. Willy longs for Ben's opportunity in Alaska, a true chance to start over and forge a new identity for one's self apart from the structures of the city.

Yet as the play holds out the West as a place where man can be free and find success, it undermines it through the characters of Biff and Happy, Willy's sons. Biff has traveled extensively in the west and has failed in every place, as he explains to his brother, Happy:

Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or – beautiful than the sight of a mare a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere!

What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week!
I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running
home.²⁴

Every place he has tried to 'make his future' and establish his identity has failed. He holds out hope for home, and yet the play undermines that hope in the form of the other Loman son Happy, who states in defense of his refusal to go West: "I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have – to come out number one man." The play gives every indication that Happy cannot actualize his father's dream, of gaining an identity as 'number one man.'²⁵ But why does Willy not go West, searching for the opportunity to create an identity and name for himself in a new context?

Willy chooses to be a salesman instead of going to Alaska because of his desire to overcome feeling 'temporary' about himself, wishing to create an everlasting name and finalizing his story and identity. In a key dream sequence involving his family, Willy says, "...Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel – kind of temporary about myself."²⁶ To create an identity, one lacking in part because of a broken relationship with his father, he chooses to sell, noting the influence of Dave Singleman: "...when he [Dave Singleman] died, hundreds of salesman and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that." In this funeral, Willy sees an opportunity to create a permanent name and achieve a lasting identity. Annette Saddik, writing on the mythos of the American dream, notes, that, "Willy sees success in America as a performance, a show of wealth and status, complete with the appropriate costumes and an adoring public."²⁷ The funeral is the final and most important 'performance' of Willy's identity. Yet in this regard, his funeral is a failure. Nobody comes. His identity doesn't matter. For Willy, a man who under the pressure of family and business has spent a life trying to make and name himself, to be 'known,' one whose car the police protect and whom the mayor greets, his self-creation ultimately ends in annihilation – unrecognized at his funeral, without an identity. In the character of Willy, *Salesman* powerfully challenges an American notion of self-authorship.

Willy Loman, Charles Taylor, and Baptism: Making an Identity

Death of a Salesman offers us a unique insight into the problem of modern identity making. Utilizing a correlational approach in which culture raises legitimate questions to which theology can attempt to provide an answer, *Salesman* offers us an instantiation of the modern problem of identity making in our interior world to which Christianity can answer. Our capitalist climate accelerates this issue. In Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, he traces the rise of ordinary work and economic forces

in the concept of modern identity: “In terms of a categorization drawn from Marx, economics focusses on the interchange between human and nature as a domain with its own laws, distinct from (even though potentially disturbed by) what happens in the domains in which humans relate to each other through politics and culture.”²⁸ That is, with the affirmation of ordinary life in the modern era, economics was seen as its own distinct area, separated from the rest of politics and culture. Once it is no longer a mere part of a greater whole, it begins to develop an outsize importance in modern man’s interior conception of himself.

Willy Loman functions as a popular level depiction of Taylor’s work. His ultimate desire, to be known as a salesman in death, shows that for him the economic identity he can earn is the most constitutive identity possible, the highest name he can name himself. We have seen above how Miller, in utilizing both realist and expressionist theatre, is able to uniquely posit Willy Loman as an everyman, a sort of stand in for a universal human desire to understand and assert our identity, to name ourselves. Willy’s father, brother, and boss all put various pressures on him to forge his identity in a certain direction, namely business success and wealth. Willy fails them, but holds out hope for his well-attended funeral, which will cement his identity as a salesman. The play ends with Willy’s death and a poorly attended funeral. Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* coherently challenges the notion that we can make our own identity. This understanding enables the church to understand how Willy Loman’s career has become the key (and ultimately fruitless) source of his identity, security, and meaning in his life.

In Taylor’s conclusion, he does find one possibility for the future of modern identity: “There is a large element of hope. It is a hope that I see implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and in its central promise of a *divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided.*”²⁹ For Taylor, affirmation of the human being must come from outside of humanity. God himself must vest humans with an identity. For Christians, this happens first and most significantly in baptism.

The Great Commission text from Matthew 28 offers Jesus’ own instructions on baptism: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Baptized into the Triune name, the believer no longer holds onto anything of his own creation or naming as the constitutive part of his identity, nor onto a chosen name or title (such as salesman), but rather the name of Christ. The early church focused especially upon baptism in the name of Jesus.³⁰ No longer does a person have to earn their identity through economic means, or moral means within a family, but an identity

is bestowed upon them and freely given. Paul, discussing baptism in his letter to the Romans, says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). Baptism bestows an identity by giving the believer the name of Christ while combining his life with the events of Christ’s life, especially the death and resurrection of Christ. Note especially the emphasis on the temporal aspect of Christ’s life in this citation from Romans. Baptism is first oriented *backward* in time, toward the death of Christ. Then it is reoriented forward, toward the resurrection of the believer, with Christ as the first fruits of that resurrection. Baptism therefore implies both an identity and a narrative.

Why choose *Salesman* specifically to illustrate the problem of modern identity making? Perhaps the most interesting part of *Salesman* is Willy’s constant struggle to stay in the present moment. His mind frequently pulls him back into vivid memories – times when he had hope for Biff and Happy, his painful affair which begins the rift with Ben, and his discussions with his former boss. Perhaps the primary example and pressure in his life, his brother Ben, is deceased and exists only in the world of his mind. Yet for Willy, Ben has an outsize importance in his present-day identity making, continually serving as a sort of example to which he can never live up. Is it any different for 24-year-old Alexa from our opening illustration? The use of Instagram offers her the opportunity to freeze moments in time and cement her past, for good or ill. Technology in general and social media exacerbates the problem which *Salesman* points out, namely the overt importance of negative memories in a present understanding of our identity. Miller demonstrates that this is a problem for every person. For Alexa, her very identity is tied to the success of these moments frozen in time. Her life, like Loman’s, is oriented towards her past, in this case, her social media accounts which form the constitutive part of her identity, her ‘name’ as an influencer. Willy and Alexa’s life narratives focus on their past, for good and ill.

In contrast, baptism in the name of Jesus, while founded in the historical death and resurrection of Christ, orients the believer forward to the coming kingdom of God. Commenting upon the eschatological focus of the early church baptism, Hartman notes how this formed a new community in light of the eschatological expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ:

It was also the door into a new human community. We found something similar in connection with John’s baptism. Several motifs in the eschatological expectations are related to such a community. Here the people of the new covenant were gathered, cleansed, forgiven, sanctified and equipped with a new spirit. Indeed, the gathering

itself can also be regarded as occurring ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus.’ In a new key the early church could link up with the gathering work of her Lord, who gathered people to himself, not in order to form a closed group or a sect, but to assemble a people of God under God’s present and imminent sovereignty.³¹

God gathers, cleanses, forgives, and bestows a new identity on the people of God through baptism in the name of Jesus, an identity oriented toward the future coming of Christ. This understanding, pointed toward the future, is also reflected in Michael Horton’s reflections and response to Taylor, in which he notes the importance of the new covenant as forming an identity:

In the Pauline eschatology, both ‘I-experience’ (*ordo salutis*) and ‘we-experience’ (*historia salutis*) are fully integrated, without surrendering to an exclusively social or individual understanding of self-identity. The covenantal self emerges in what Alasdair MacIntyre calls ‘the narrative unity of life’ and, we might add, the narrative unity of all the lives lived in the history of God’s covenant people. And that life is told by God back to us as we find ourselves in the drama of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.³²

Baptism gives us both a name, that of Christ, and an identity within God’s narrative which orients us toward the future coming of Christ and the full consummation of the kingdom. The fundamental identity given in baptism informs the believer in every aspect of life: familial, economic, and in every area: from beginning to end, creation to consummation.

Conclusion: Baptism Gives an Everlasting Name

Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* uniquely points out the problem of self-authorship, trying to forge an identity and name for ourselves. Willy Loman is an everyman, representing all of us in our struggle to name ourselves and understand our identities before others. Willy tries to earn his identity through economic means, to gain an everlasting name through his funeral. His attempt is ultimately a failure, as nobody outside of his family and Charley attend his funeral. Miller attacks the cultural mythology that we are entirely free individuals, able to craft our own identity. This problem is not unique to America but applies to all cultures in the universal human struggle to name ourselves. This problem is growing in significance as more and more attempt to craft their identity through social media.

In response to the problem posed by *Salesman*, Christianity has a clear answer to offer: baptism into the name of Jesus. In baptism we are given the very name of Christ and made members of God’s family. Our baptismal identity also places us into the divine narrative which reorients us toward the future coming

of Christ. Whereas Willy's identity is always bound up in his painful past, the identity of a Christian is pointed toward the future realization of God's promises. This assessment helps the church to understand the problem of modern identity making and speak about the lasting identity we have in baptism to a culture which encourages our self-authorship. The church in mission repeats God's promises to the outsider in Isaiah: "I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (Is 56:5).

Endnotes

- 1 Sophie Elmirst, "Meet Alexa: Inside the Mind of a Digital Native," *1843 Magazine*, December 2019, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/meet-alexa-inside-the-mind-of-a-digital-native>
- 2 The Economist's Twitter shared this story: <https://twitter.com/TheEconomist/status/1067876720756383744>
- 3 "Meet Alexa: Inside the Mind of a Digital Native."
- 4 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), ix.
- 5 Arthur Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," in *Arthur Miller: Collected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 93.
- 6 See Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, trans. Una Ellis Fermor (New York: Penguin Books, 1951).
- 7 Arthur Miller, "Extract from *Timebends: A Life*," in *Arthur Miller: Collected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 205.
- 8 "Extract from *Timebends: A Life*," 205. Emphasis added.
- 9 Arthur Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," in *Arthur Miller: Collected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 93.
- 10 Barbara Lounsberry, "'The Woods are Burning': Expressionism in *Death of a Salesman*," in *Approaches to Teaching Miller's Death of a Salesman*, ed. Matthew C. Roudane (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 53.
- 11 "The Family in Modern Drama," 92.
- 12 Arthur Miller, "Walking with Arthur Miller." Interview by John Lahr, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/walking-with-arthur-miller>.
- 13 "Extract from *Timebends: A Life*," 205. Emphasis added.
- 14 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 1.
- 15 *Death of a Salesman*, 1.
- 16 *Death of a Salesman*, 36-37.

- 17 *Death of a Salesman*, 37.
- 18 *Death of a Salesman*, 23.
- 19 *Death of a Salesman*, 27.
- 20 *Death of a Salesman*, 60.
- 21 *Death of a Salesman*, 60.
- 22 *Death of a Salesman*, 62.
- 23 *Death of a Salesman*, 6.
- 24 *Death of a Salesman*, 11.
- 25 *Death of a Salesman*, 11.
- 26 *Death of a Salesman*, 36.
- 27 Annette Saddik, *Contemporary American Drama* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 60.
- 28 *Sources of the Self*, 286.
- 29 *Sources of the Self*, 521. Emphasis added.
- 30 See Acts 8:16, 10:48, 19:5.
- 31 Lars Hartman, *'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus': Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 47.
- 32 Michael S. Horton, "Image and Office: Human Personhood and the Covenant," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. by Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 201.

The Texts of Faith in Times of Tragedy: A Theological Analysis of "God Bless America"

Ryan Anderson

Introduction

September 11, 2001 was an unprecedented tragedy for the United States of America. An act of terrorism took the lives of 2,996 individuals and shook the nation to its core. Tragedy burned itself into the nation's memory. As expected during a national catastrophe, the nation entered a state of mourning. Citizens sought comfort in various places, including patriotism and national identity. One such instance was a televised benefit concert held only ten days after the attack entitled *America: A Tribute to Heroes*. Of the artists who took the stage that night, Celine Dion's performance of Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" continues to stand as a fascinating example of the phenomenon known as "American civil religion" and its connection to national tragedies like terrorism.

This paper will focus on that phenomenon and its longstanding tension with American Christianity. I will investigate how American civil religion emerges when faced with tragedy. The investigation will be done by way of a case study: a thorough analysis of Celine Dion's performance of "God Bless America," the history of the original song and its author, and the variety of responses her performance has fostered both then and now, particularly online. What we will discover is that practitioners of civil religion existentially and therapeutically depend on an "encounter with the divine" during times of national tragedy. This encounter is achieved by borrowing from various texts and practices of other religions — in this case, a prayer — in a way that is divorced from their original intent. Such acts of borrowing can maintain dynamic emotional force, even decades after the initial act of appropriation.

This paper will also critique what can be perceived as a deficient response on the part of the Church in America to the tragedy that was 9/11 and will tentatively suggest a way forward. The aim of this essay is to suggest a way for the Church to faithfully bear witness to Christ in the midst of national tragedy. This is theologically

significant because the Church must speak faithfully in such times, urging the nation to seek healing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not in American patriotism or civil religion.

Hope for the Hopeless

Those who observed television coverage and saw the second plane hit the South Tower shortly after 9:00 a.m.¹ on that Tuesday will never forget where they were, who they were with, and how they reacted. Tragedy, especially national tragedy, has that sort of impact upon mankind. Pain and sorrow burdened the hearts of Americans for years afterwards. For those who lost friends and family members in the attacks, the pain persists to the present day.²

Pain endured after that day because the terrorist attacks threatened the fundamental values of American civil religion. As Peter Gardella notes in his recent book on the dynamics of civil religion, “immediately after the attacks of 2001, explanations of why the terrorists hated the United States focused on the values of American civil religion.”³ Since freedom, democracy, and tolerance are the key tenets of this civil faith, many Americans assumed that the terrorists were out to destroy those pivotal values; that this new enemy despised peace and sought to sow seeds of discord. We may never know the precise reasons why the terrorists acted as they did, but Gardella suggests that the broad interpretation of those actions was one of civil religion.

But what exactly is “American civil religion”? Concise definitions are hardly exhaustive, but Paul Christopher Johnson shows in a recent article how Jean Jacques Rousseau expressed the “positive dogma” of civil religion in a simple and concise fashion. This includes: “the existence of an all-powerful, good and intelligent divinity, the afterlife to come, the belief in justice or the good, the punishment of evil-doers, and the sanctity of the social contract and its laws. The only sin for civil religion was intolerance.”⁴ These sound like the tenets of American patriotism. In fact, we may equate American civil religion with patriotism. These dogmas play themselves out on a national scale every time that the President gives the State of the Union Address. They also evidenced themselves clearly after the terrorist attacks.

After tragedy, every American must find a way to grieve. For those who are religious, tragedy turns them to their god for answers. After the great tragedy which befell Job, he worshipped the LORD God and said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Jb 1:20-21). Christ Himself, when he was grieving the death of his friend Lazarus, cried out to his Father in prayer (Jn 11:41)

Men seek out a higher power during grief because they believe that it has the ability to do something about it. In times of national tragedy, religious men seek out their god for identity, purpose, and meaning when those ideals are challenged by their circumstances.

Likewise, after a national tragedy, those who rely upon American civil religion must also find a way to grieve. The difficulty presented to them is that American civil religion has no prayers of its own, so it must appropriate the texts of other faiths in order to speak to a higher power. Gardella again is helpful by showing that the tenets of American civil religion are held through reason, even if most Americans “have not come to those values through reason. They have learned to value liberty, democracy, peace, and tolerance through the monuments, texts, and images of American civil religion.”⁵ Many of the texts which are used by American civil religion, especially during times of mourning after a national tragedy, are borrowed from religious tradition. The near seamlessness of this religious borrowing after the attacks on 9/11 explains why there was a growth in church attendance on the Sundays that followed: what people heard and appreciated from sources of civil religion were the words and practices of traditional religions, especially Christianity.

This is not to say the practitioners and priests of American civil religion neglected to hold their own forms of worship services. One of those borrowed prayers in one of those gatherings of civil religion will allow us to reflect on how American civil religion grieves and how the Church can speak to civil religion in a time of national tragedy. The benefit concert called *America: A Tribute to Heroes* contained a performance of the well-known “God Bless America.”

A Text, A Context, and Healing

Irving Berlin’s song originated in a context unknown to most Americans. He is famous for “White Christmas,” but few will know that he also wrote “God Bless America.” The song was originally intended to be a prayer of thanksgiving to God for blessing him in his new homeland. Berlin’s personal background elucidates why this prayer meant so much to him.

Irving Berlin was born during a tumultuous time in Russian history. Revolutionaries assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881, but Jews received blame for the deed. Subsequent attacks involved the destruction of property and loss of life. John Shaw, who wrote one of the biographies on Berlin’s life, recounts that Berlin’s very first memory was watching his family home burn to the ground.⁶ Due to the persecution and risk of death, Berlin’s family fled Russia and immigrated to America, landing in New York in late 1893.

Initially, the family found little success in their new homeland. Berlin's father died when he was eight years old, and by age thirteen, Berlin dropped out of school to provide for his family. He had no great musical skill, finding success only by great effort and repetition. It was this sort of perseverance that led Berlin to become one of the most prolific and respected songwriters of his era.⁷

Although he experienced great success as an artist and is responsible for many powerful songs, "God Bless America" held a special place in Berlin's heart, reflecting his love for his new homeland. Contemplating in hindsight, Berlin told the *New York Times* in 1940 that the song was "an expression of gratitude for what this country has done for its citizens, of what home really means."⁸ Although he originally wrote the song as the concluding number of a revue for his military company called Yip, Yip Yaphank, he deleted the number from the performance because he felt that it did not fit with the jubilant and comical nature of the rest of the show. In his mind, the song was too emotional and too somber to be combined with such a light-hearted comedy. As Stephen Prothero's book cataloguing the evolution of American patriotism suggests, "Berlin thought the song—a prayer set to music—was too heavy for such lighthearted entertainment, so he put it away, only to dust it off in 1938."⁹ Kate Smith's performance of the song in that year resurrected the otherwise dormant prayer and began its transformation into a song of patriotic proportions.

By the time the song was played post-9/11, it had become the nation's song of choice for patriotic expression. Prothero suggests that it even displaced the national anthem after the tragedy, because "rockets' red glare" and "bombs bursting in air" seemed inappropriate and emotionally laden following the fireballs caused by the jets on that Tuesday.¹⁰ This is why Celine Dion's performance on September 21, 2001 sticks in the minds of so many Americans. "God Bless America" had become America's song—it gave the chance for the nation to express the emotions felt after 9/11 and to find healing in its lyrics.

Dion's performance is set in the context of the larger memorial service called *America: A Tribute to Heroes*.¹¹ It was dedicated to those first responders and citizens who lost their lives on 9/11. Funds raised benefited the victims, especially the New York Police Department and the New York Fire Department. Twenty-one performers offered musical acts that night. "God Bless America" was the twentieth. The background was lit with burning candles to signify the hope of a nation shrouded in darkness. Even those with negative reviews of the event (and specifically the performance of "God Bless America") noted that "not even a glutinous performance

by the Canadian pop balladeer Celine Dion could erase the sweep and balance of Berlin's great melody."¹²

The performance begins with Dion and the choir behind her covered in darkness, an obvious reference to the darkness of terrorism that enveloped the nation. Dion emerges in a single spotlight, setting her performance as a light in the gloom. She sings through the entire song solo, and then dim lights slowly rise to illuminate the chorus standing behind Dion. They join in unison throughout the entire second chorus, a strong nod toward the unity that is important to American civil religion. Near the end of the rendition, a bright ray of light can be seen streaming out from behind the chorus, again calling attention to the performance as a remedy to the darkness of terrorism. Vocally, Dion's most-emphasized word was "America," a fitting emphasis for the occasion in which it was sung. All of this imagery devoid of its original significance, with Dion at the center, stands not as a religious ceremony and priestess offering up prayer to any god in particular, but as an expression of patriotic unity in the form of civil religion directed toward a nondescript deity that has America's general interests in mind.

Comments on the YouTube video of her performance show that it was received in three general ways. Some users viewed the performance as a means for healing the sorrow they felt after 9/11. Some individuals saw the performance as an emphasis of patriotism and love of country, even using it to criticize Dion for her Canadian heritage. The final group of people viewed the performance as an opportunity for peace and unity across the boundaries of nations. Each of these will be expanded in more detail below.

The first group of comments focused on the performance as a therapeutic moment of healing. This best aligns with Gordon Lynch's existential/hermeneutical religious function of culture, where a cultural artifact helps "people interpret reality and gain a sense of identity, security, and meaning in life."¹³ Rachel Burdick-Hanks commented, "SAD ALL THE LIFES LOST BUT WE WILL NEVER FORGET."¹⁴ BK Lulu shared that she "cried when I saw her sing this." Perhaps the most therapeutic comment of them all was from whoareyou2me, who said, "Thank you Celine. Thank you. This was a horrible, painful time, but this helped." None of these comments mentioned a higher power or deity as the agent for this healing. The song itself is attributed the power to heal and comfort.

In the second group of comments, patriotism and love of country replaced love of God. Civil religion in the time of tragedy has a way of erasing the figure of God in this way. David Doe said, "My a Canadian who is singing God bless America she must like or even love the USA. I can't see anything wrong with that." Some

users found an issue with Dion's heritage and nationality. A comment by heliostellar exemplifies this strand: "She isn't American... has she even attempted to become an American? It's phony for a foreigner to sing our patriotic songs when they are not a patriot." For heliostellar, the pain of 9/11 could be healed by a patriotic song, but not if sung by a foreigner such as Dion.

The third group of comments were a series of individuals who used the song as an occasion to wish for peace across national borders. Faskimy3344 said, "God bless USA, God bless all of us and may peace be spread worldwide." Peace is a fundamental tenet of American civil religion. Some commenters were from other countries, such as Mark Van Winckel, who said, "GOD BLESS AMERICA for now and forever from a Belgium citizen. I love you American people for now and forever and care you for always in my heart." This group of comments advances the idea of peace while only sometimes mentioning the name of God.

The performance of "God Bless America" in *America: A Tribute to Heroes* perfectly aligns with American civil religion. Michael Lienesch, in his article about American patriotic nationalism, notes that it "devised new civil religious rituals, organizing public celebrations that closely emulated worship services, with invocations, benedictions, creedal statements, patriotic hymns, and public prayers."¹⁵ This celebration and memorial emulates a worship service, with "God Bless America" closely resembling a hymn. American civil religion took Irving Berlin's private prayer and made it a public statement promoting the ideals of peace, concord, unity, and healing. The conclusion which the organizers of *America: A Tribute to Heroes* want hearers to reach is that "God Bless America" has the power to heal the fractured nation and can save the nation in times of tragedy.

Mutual Conversation

So, when the aftermath of 9/11 leads to a public turn toward civil religion and the performance of "God Bless America" reveals how civil religion works with the language of faith, what is the Church to do? Both culture and Church can teach us something about response to tragedy. I argue that the Church has responded poorly in the past, especially in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. Responses post-9/11 advanced the tenets of American civil religion. As a result, I propose a way forward that combines our teaching on the incarnation of the God who takes our pain into Himself and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a witness to the world.

When the culture makes its own response to national tragedy, especially in the form of a patriotic event such as *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, it seeks healing in

its own identity. Philip Gorski's monograph, *American Covenant*, traces the history of American civil religion from the Puritans until the present day. A paragraph toward the conclusion of his book is worth reproducing in its entirety:

We are, or at least aspire to be, a sovereign and democratic people. We are part of a collective, multigenerational project, an ongoing effort to realize a set of universal political ideals—above all, freedom and equality—from within the confines of a particular historical trajectory. Some of us are thrown into this project by birth; others enter into it by immigration. We are part of an ever-expanding river flowing through historical time toward an uncertain horizon. Our civic conversation concerns those who have entered and exited the stream before us, and the course that we hope to steer into the future.¹⁶

Therefore, American civil religion is a collective project to realize universal ideals like freedom and equality. Efforts of men toward this final goal are portrayed most clearly during emotionally trying moments. The post-9/11 concert and telethon stand as proof that tragedy has a way of bringing the nation together in a cooperative project that rarely exists in peacetime. We can see now how the performance of “God Bless America” described above was a small contribution to an immense project that has existed since the beginning of American democracy. Dion and her chorus showed that “God Bless America” can contribute to inspiring the work of American civil religion.

Every performance of “God Bless America” since September 11, 2001 advanced this American patriotic vision. Consider every time that the song is sung during the seventh-inning-stretch at many baseball games. The unison of the crowd speaks volumes about what is happening in those moments. America as a vision is at work when “God Bless America” plays and is sung by a chorus of voices, *native* and *immigrant* alike. In her defining work on the song, Sheryl Kaskowitz writes, “‘God Bless America’ was one of a series of patriotic symbols that acknowledged the tragedy of 9/11 but then allowed spectators to melt into the crowd and the game.”¹⁷ People felt a moment of catharsis and healing through the song, quite similar to the moment of healing that some felt after Dion's performance.

The great irony of the multiplicity of performances of “God Bless America” is that the title figure is often left out of the picture. The song, written as a prayer to Irving Berlin's God, is used for therapeutic and existential purposes while forgetting the God who heals his people. By removing God from the picture, the American culture has robbed itself of the beauty of Berlin's lyrics. As Robert Bellah puts it,

“today the American civil religion is an empty and broken shell”¹⁸ because the words that it uses are meaningless.

As it stands, the culture cannot bring God into the picture. That responsibility falls to the Church. The problem is that therapeutic preaching, hardly differentiable from the slogans of civil religion, has often served as the Church’s default public response to catastrophe. This has only furthered the meaninglessness of American civil religion. Instead, the Church has something better to offer. This offer will subtly critique the vacuous nature of civil religion while providing hope in time of tragedy.

Billy Graham’s message at the Washington National Cathedral on Friday, September 14, 2001, four days after the tragedy, serves as an excellent example:

A tragedy like this could have torn our country apart, but instead it has united us. So those perpetrators who took this on to tear us apart, it has worked the other way—it has backlashed. We are more united than ever before. I think this was exemplified in a very moving way when the members of our Congress stood shoulder to shoulder and sang, “God Bless America.”¹⁹

The Church has much more that it can offer a culture enveloped in tragedy. Amid sorrow, the Church brings the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. As Philip Yancey puts it in a beautiful paragraph published shortly after the Newtown shooting:

Tragedy rightly calls faith into question, but it also affirms faith. It is good news that we are not the random byproducts of a meaningless universe, but rather creations of a loving God who wants to live with us forever. That “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” in order to reconcile with his rebellious creation. That by entering our world, the Son took on our sufferings and temptations, demonstrating in person that nothing—not even death—can separate us from the love of God.²⁰

Yancey’s words apply after the events of any national tragedy. The Incarnation is the Church’s response to national tragedy, because the incarnation is God’s response to national tragedy. The suffering of the Son of God, in that “he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Is 53:4), fills the need of Americans for a Savior who knows the depths of pain and suffering. With the incarnation, hurting people are brought into contact with the God who became flesh and felt the depths of human woe.²¹

The second reply which the Church must make in times of national tragedy is an emphasis upon the resurrection. As Yancey writes, “Easter Sunday gave a sure and certain sign of contradiction, demonstrating that nothing can withstand the healing force of a loving God. We live out our days on Holy Saturday, aware of the redemptive power of suffering while awaiting the restoration power of creation made new.”²² The events of September 11, 2001 inaugurated a lengthy Holy Saturday, where death appeared to be the final word, and all was gloom. But the message of Easter is that death itself will die. The hope which the Church can offer in national tragedy is not just any old platitude of healing that aligns with the discourse of civil religion. No, only the Christian Church can proclaim the message of Easter: Jesus is risen, and we shall arise. The hope for victims of 9/11, and for the country which suffered thereafter, is in Jesus Christ and him incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and reigning on high.

Conclusion

In this way, the Church offers a response to the culture which turns to civil religion for comfort during times of national tragedy. American civil religion, through the playing of songs like “God Bless America,” can create a sense of peace and a universal brotherhood. However, it cannot offer ultimate healing from the hurt. A common question asked during times of distress is “Where is God when it hurts?” Yancey urges the importance of the Church when answering this question, suggesting that it be rephrased, “Where is the church when it hurts?”²³

American civil religion often receives severe blame among theologians, who see it as an empty, meaningless construction that leaves God out of its picture. This essay has shown that characterization contains much truth. However, we must not so quickly dismiss American civil religion in times of tragedy. The fact that “God Bless America” (a prayer) was borrowed for *America: A Tribute to Heroes* shows that the culture needs avenues to grieve and find meaning. The Church can provide those avenues, but we must guide the culture in their use of those texts and meanings to arrive at a place that is both biblical and salutary.

Does God bless America? Yes: penultimately through our collective efforts at peace and brotherhood. And ultimately through his Son, the One who became incarnate to take upon himself our sorrows and to abolish them by his death and resurrection. The collective efforts of man “are like a polluted garment” (Is 64:6). In the pursuit of goodness apart from the divine, civil religion is bad. The project that is American civil religion is ultimately futile.

On the other hand, civil religion is good in that it advocates for ideals for which the Church also advocates: freedom, justice, and goodness. Though it promotes these things apart from the blessing of the divine, the Church steps in to provide divine truth. That divine truth is well summarized in a quotation from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Return of the King*:

But Sam lay back, and stared with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?"²⁴

If the resurrection is true, then the answer to Sam's question is an emphatic yes. Everything that is sad is going to come untrue. This is the Church's response in times of tragedy to a culture that is hurting, to a civil religion that cannot provide that answer itself. And so, the Church can lead the culture to pray,

God bless America, land that I love
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with the light from above
From the mountains to the prairies
To the oceans white with foam
God bless America, my home sweet home

but not in the way that you think.

Endnotes

- 1 "Flight Path Study – United Airlines Flight 175," National Transportation Safety Board, February 19, 2002.
- 2 That pain has been memorialized and expressed in a museum on Ground Zero. For an excellent review of that museum, consult Amy Sodaro, "Affect, Performativity and Politics in the 9/11 Museum," *Liminalities* 14, no. 3 (2018): 171–192.
- 3 Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 352.

- 4 Paul Christopher Johnson, "Savage Civil Religion," *Numen* 52, no. 3 (2005): 298.
- 5 *American Civil Religion*, 5-6.
- 6 John Shaw, *This Land That I Love: Irving Berlin, Woody Guthrie, and the Story of Two American Anthems* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013), 9.
- 7 John Shaw records that Berlin's sixty-year career saw 451 hit songs, including 35 that reached number one on the music charts; see *This Land That I Love*, 6.
- 8 S. J. Woolf, "What Makes a Song: A Talk with Irving Berlin," *New York Times*, July 28, 1940; cited in Stephen Prothero, *The American Bible: How Our Words United, Divide, and Define a Nation* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 227.
- 9 *The American Bible*, 227.
- 10 *The American Bible*, 226.
- 11 Manuel HR, "Celine Dion – God Bless America (Tribute to Heroes)," YouTube video, 3:41, October 21, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfdcrUDQ_tc&list=PL4CFDA891835F28EC&index=19.
- 12 Terry Teachout, "Prime-Time Patriotism," *Commentary* 112, no. 4 (November, 2001): 53.
- 13 Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 28.
- 14 All comments from YouTube were accessed on December 8, 2018.
- 15 Michael Lienesch, "Contesting Civil Religion: Religious Responses to American Patriotic Nationalism, 1919–1929," *Religion and American Culture* 28, no. 1 (Winter, 2018): 98.
- 16 Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 222.
- 17 Sheryl Kaskowitz, *God Bless America: The Surprising History of an Iconic Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 127.
- 18 Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 142.
- 19 Billy Graham, "Billy Graham's 9/11 Message from the Washington National Cathedral" (2001), Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <https://billygraham.org/story/a-day-to-remember-a-day-of-victory/>.
- 20 Philip Yancey, "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb: Not Even Senseless Murder Can Separate Us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus," *Christianity Today* 57, no. 3 (April 2013): 25.
- 21 "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb," 27
- 22 "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb," 28.
- 23 "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb," 28.
- 24 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 229–230.

Walther on Confessional Agreement and Church Fellowship: A Historical Response to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Christian J. Einertson

In its report, *Church Relations in the 21st Century*,¹ the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) addresses many of the challenges faced by the Missouri Synod as she enters a new era of global interconnection and is consequently confronted with a variety of church bodies near and far who seek support from, cooperation with, and even altar-and-pulpit fellowship with her. In this report, the CTCR helpfully points out that the differing histories of other church bodies around the world have caused their assumptions regarding ecumenical relationships to differ from those of the Missouri Synod, which were themselves shaped by her own history and the broader history of Lutheranism in America. In light of those differing assumptions, the CTCR puts forward the following proposal on how to approach the question of confessional agreement with other church bodies who seek fellowship with the Missouri Synod:

It does not seem appropriate to impose our synod's history or church orders upon Lutheran church bodies in other countries, or to view them through the lenses of the histories of Lutheran churches in North America (e.g., Germans and Norwegians with reference to the Formula of Concord). Where we do not share histories of theological disagreement or controversy (especially with "emerging church bodies"), it may be more appropriate to begin with the assumption that we are in confessional agreement with those who have subscribed unconditionally to the entire *Book of Concord* until we are shown otherwise. In cases where an emerging church body does not have vernacular access to the entire *Book of Concord*, a similar assumption of agreement may be in order with those who have subscribed only to the parts of the *Book of Concord* which are available to them. Finally, in cases where a church body has chosen not to subscribe to a confessional writing (such as the Formula of Concord), we should seek to determine whether the reason for non-subscription has more to do with custom or history

before simply assuming that it represents substantive, doctrinal disagreement (e.g., churches which were planted by Scandinavian missionaries and which are in agreement with the teachings of the entire *Book of Concord*, without formally subscribing to the entire book).²

While the story of the Germans and the Norwegians and their relationships to the Formula of Concord is a long and multifaceted one, the CTCR did not describe in any further detail what it meant to express in alluding to it. With this lack of detail, it seems to caution against the use of a potentially helpful historical example. In an effort to reinforce the CTCR's broader proposal, this paper will explore the historical relationship between the Missouri Synod (and, more specifically, Dr. C. F. W. Walther) and the Norwegian Synod during the nineteenth century to show how they approached the issue of confessional agreement and church fellowship with one another. In the end, this should show that at least one instance of the very historical parallel that the CTCR seems to caution against drawing (i.e. "Germans and Norwegians with reference to the Formula of Concord") actually lends historical support to their recommendations and reinforces their broader proposal for approaching church fellowship in the twenty-first century.

In order to consider the historical relationship between the two synods, it is useful to begin with the founding of the Norwegian Synod. After one abortive attempt at a constitution,³ the Norwegian Synod was founded in 1853 with the following confessional basis enshrined in her constitution:

The church's doctrine is that which is revealed by God's holy Word in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in agreement with the Norwegian Church's symbolical books or confessional writings, which are: 1) the Apostles' Creed, 2) the Nicene Creed, 3) the Athanasian Creed, 4) the articles of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which were delivered to Emperor Charles V in Augsburg in 1530, 5) Luther's Small Catechism.⁴

Quickly apparent to Missourians past and present is the fact that this confessional basis appears somewhat abbreviated, as it lacks the Large Catechism, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord. Despite such an appearance, however, the confessional basis was not intentionally truncated. On the contrary, the founders of the Norwegian Synod considered this to be a full confessional subscription, as the Lutheran Church in Denmark and Norway had never adopted these other confessional writings as her own symbols.⁵ This does not mean that the Norwegians were ignorant of the other confessional writings in the Book of

Concord; the clergy considered study of these other symbols to be indispensable to a seminary education.⁶ Yet even though the clergy of the Norwegian Synod were well acquainted with the Book of Concord but did not subscribe to it, there is no reason to suspect that they disagreed with any of its contents. Rather, it appears that they shared the belief common among Scandinavians that subscription to the Augsburg Confession was tantamount to a subscription to the whole Book of Concord, the rest of which was seen as the authoritative explanation of the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession.⁷

Only a few years after the approval of this constitution, the Norwegian Synod came into formal contact with the Missouri Synod as a result of the former's attempt to find a suitable institution of theological education for the training of pastors, more of which were desperately needed on the ever-expanding frontier.⁸ In their preliminary interactions with Dr. Walther and the Missourians during their visits to the schools in St. Louis and Ft. Wayne, Norwegian Synod pastors J. A. Ottesen and N. Brandt recognized these Germans as brothers who shared the same confession of faith, with the result that they recommended Concordia College in St. Louis as the ideal home for a Norwegian theological professorship, a recommendation that the Norwegian Synod in convention readily adopted. That this perception of brotherhood and common confession was reciprocated by the Missourians is evident in the subsequent decision of the Missouri Synod to extend the hand of fellowship to their brethren in the Norwegian Synod.⁹ Noteworthy in the present discussion is the fact that the Missourians, known for strictly requiring their clergy to subscribe unconditionally to the entire Book of Concord,¹⁰ did not mention the more limited confessional basis of the Norwegian Synod in the account of the convention.

The absence of any mention in the Norwegians' confessional standard of the Book of Concord or the bulk of the symbolical books contained therein did not escape the notice of the Missourians, however. Indeed, as one might expect, the issue of how two church bodies with different confessional bases could properly be in fellowship with one another came to the fore during Dr. Walther's report on his recent work, *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent from the State*,¹¹ at the synodical convention of 1863.¹² As Walther was speaking on the confessional subscription that should be required of pastors and congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the question was asked: "If we thus require our congregations to confess (at least indirectly) all of the Symbols, if the servants of our churches are bound to all of the Symbols, do we consider it necessary for other churches, such as the Norwegian Church, for example, to be bound to the Symbols in the same way if we are to recognize them as proper Lutheran churches?"¹³ This question was of particular consequence because of the sizeable Norwegian

delegation present at the convention.¹⁴ In his response to the question, Walther gives his reasoning for how it is possible for the Missouri Synod to enter into and remain in fellowship with a church body that does not subscribe to the whole Book of Concord:

Each of us will agree that when the matter of obligation to all of the Symbols comes to the record, we don't wish to say that a church is not truly Lutheran if she does not proclaim the whole array of our Symbols as her own confession. The Danish-Norwegian Church has not officially adopted the Large Catechism, the Smalcald Articles, or the Formula of Concord as her confession, yet she has always been recognized as a true Lutheran church. Norway was so fortunate that no Crypto-Calvinists, Crypto-Papists, or other fanatics, against whom the Formula of Concord had to be laid down in Germany, caused unrest in her church, though that land was not without a few individual secret Calvinists. If the Danish-Norwegian Church had wished to introduce these confessional writings in the land, she would have been in danger of inducing quarrels and unrest within herself. This is thus the reason why these confessional writings were not officially adopted in that church. It is false and wrong when one so often reads that the Norwegian Church is not so confessionally constituted as the German, for even if all of the Symbols have not been officially adopted there, theologians such as Brockmann,¹⁵ Lassenius,¹⁶ and others demonstrate that the Book of Concord has consistently been looked upon as the book of the Lutheran faith and confession. Incidentally, not only are the faithful Norwegian Lutherans in this country seeking to adopt the whole Book of Concord, but it is currently being translated into Norwegian in Norway.¹⁷

Here we see Walther's expectations of how the Missouri Synod should assess doctrinal agreement before entering into fellowship with another church body. While he was certainly not lax on the issue of unconditional subscription to the Confessions,¹⁸ *quia* subscription to the entire Book of Concord did not constitute the *sine qua non* of church fellowship for Walther. Rather, he describes the Lutheran Church in Denmark and Norway (and, by extension, the Norwegian Synod) as "a true Lutheran Church," despite her lack of subscription to the entire Book of Concord. This is because Walther recognized that the Norwegian Synod's reasons for a more limited confessional subscription than Missouri's "ha[d] more to do with custom or history" than with "substantive, doctrinal disagreement," to borrow language from the CTCR.¹⁹ Thus, for Walther, it was agreement on the doctrine

found in the Book of Concord, not a particular confessional subscription, that constituted the *sine qua non* for church fellowship.

Further, not only did the Norwegian Synod come out of a tradition that did not require subscription to the whole Book of Concord, she also lacked access to vernacular translations of the entirety of the symbols contained therein, though Walther notes that a translation project²⁰ was underway. Yet she willingly subscribed unconditionally²¹ to those symbols to which she had access in the Norwegian language with the exception of Luther's Large Catechism, as W. A. Werels's translation of that document was seen by the Norwegians as having been "irresponsibly changed in many respects."²² Walther also appeared to share the hope of the Norwegians that the entire Book of Concord could be given confessional status in the Norwegian Synod after the remaining symbols were translated into Norwegian,²³ a progression similar to that which he outlined for individual (presumably German) congregations who were not yet willing to subscribe to all the symbols due to a lack of familiarity with them.²⁴

Thus, it appears that the Missourian approach to fellowship with the Norwegian Synod as explained by Walther bears a striking resemblance to the CTCR's proposal for determining confessional agreement with other church bodies who do not share Missouri's unique theological history. Admittedly, the confessional situation of the Norwegian and Danish churches is somewhat unique in the history of global Lutheranism, yet the fact remains that in actions and words, Walther demonstrated both a willingness to assume confessional unity with a synod who subscribed unconditionally to those parts of the Book of Concord that were available to her and an understanding that a custom of more limited confessional subscription did not necessarily indicate disagreement with the doctrine found in the Book of Concord. In this regard, the relationship between the Missouri Synod and the Norwegian Synod during the latter half of the nineteenth century is not only a helpful historical lens through which to view church relations in the twenty-first century but also a connection to Missouri's past that quite effectively reinforces the CTCR's broader proposal for her as she strives for a faithful witness in matters of church fellowship moving forward.

Appendix: Translation of an Excerpt from Discussion of §21 of Prof. Walther's Report on "The Proper Form of an Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation that is Independent of the State"²⁵

As to note #4, the Synod gave the following clarifications: These days it has become the rule that when one speaks of the symbolical books, one speaks of them as a loathsome burden that is laid on a person's neck by the Church, a burden from which he must free himself. He must only see that he is not deceived by figures of speech! One ensures freedom for the congregations if they just throw off this yoke. But it is precisely because such a person wishes to take away the congregations' freedom that he seeks to steal the confessional writings from them. The Confessions are exactly that which the Lutheran congregations preserve so that they may not become knaves and so that they do not need to accept any preachers who preach what seems good to themselves. The Confessions are the safeguard of freedom, the bulwark, so that congregations do not need to let themselves be yoked by every random preacher and listen to him. With the Confessions in hand, they can confront every preacher and say, "It stands written here how the Bible must be interpreted in the Lutheran Church. If you don't interpret it this way, just leave us alone. We don't want any other pastor [*Seelsorger*] than the one who binds himself with a holy obligation to interpret the Holy Scriptures according to these books since we have come to recognize that the teaching laid out in them agrees in all its articles with the Word of God. For this reason, the teaching of the Confessions is the heavenly, eternal truth." If such a person does not wish to have this obligation placed upon him, he shows in this way that he does not intend to proclaim the entire Lutheran truth. Rather he wishes to secure freedom for himself to preach whatever seems good to him. Not only the General Synod but also the so-called "strict Lutherans," such as the Iowa Synod,²⁶ for example, write publically in this manner: "Not everything contained in our Confessions constitutes our confession because it is in the Confessions. It is necessary to interpret and understand the symbolical books historically, that is to consider how things looked 300 years ago, to take the history of the Reformation as our aid, so that we can see what the antithesis was of many of the things said [in our Confessions]. Then one will find that, because of certain prevailing circumstances, our Symbols declare many things that no longer apply because our situation has changed. They are a historically valuable, venerable document, but now we live in a different time with different antitheses. While the Confessions employ certain expressions against the pope and the papacy, these must be understood according to the perspective of the confessors at that time. For example, when they call the pope the Antichrist, it should be understood that they stood at the beginnings of the development of doctrine, but this development continues to take rapid steps toward its consummation." On the contrary, under

these circumstances, we ought to consider what a magnificent treasure we have in the Symbols and thank God that he has fixed and established us upon them with our confession. What and where would the Missouri Synod be if we did not have these books and confess them with our whole heart!

Here this reservation was made known: if the pastors are to be bound to all the symbolical books, whether one can be content if congregations only constitutionally require their members to bind themselves to the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession in order for them to enter the congregation. The following response was made to that reservation: it is presupposed that each preacher has not only read the whole Book of Concord but has also carefully examined whether every article of doctrine [*Lehrsatz*] contained therein is in agreement with the Holy Scriptures. Yet that cannot be required of every congregation member, and it is indeed impossible for someone to be bound to something that he does not know. What good does it do if over the door of the congregation one finds, “This congregation confesses all of the Symbols,” but the people walking through the door don’t know them? On the contrary, if they not only know the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession but also confess them from their hearts, they will hear passages from the other confessions and not recoil from them, reject them, or despise them but rather heartily rejoice when this or that part of their catechism is illuminated by the other confessions. Furthermore, it is good to remember that the symbolical books themselves in one passage say that the Small Catechism is adopted as the confession of the laity, and another passage calls the Augsburg Confession such a common confession, which all Christians confess in common. On the basis of these two passages, the Confessions themselves indicate that it is enough for ordinary Lutheran Christians to be bound to the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. It cannot be denied that it is actually burdensome to consciences to bind all members of Lutheran congregations to the whole Book of Concord, no matter how well-intentioned and laudable the zeal for our confessional writings to which the aforementioned reservation speaks.

The above argument was not universally satisfying, and thus the question arose again whether it were not indeed necessary to bind the members of congregations to all of the Symbols, so the Synod felt itself compelled to clarify the matter still further: the practical result of regarding such a thing as necessary would primarily be that a pastor, if he receives a call from a congregation, would have to say, “I cannot accept this call until I am convinced that you all know the Symbols. Thus, I must first go over the symbolical books with you for a suitable length of time.” Therefore, what is required of the congregation is actually not to be bound to the Symbols but rather a confession of them. If, then, a congregation confesses the Small

Catechism and the Augsburg Confession, she confesses the doctrine that simply finds its further exposition in the other symbols. It is true in a certain sense that the whole Book of Concord is not for every true Christian. What we want to say, however, is only that not every true Christian has the aptitude and gift to understand it and to employ it properly. That is why our church has various Symbols. She has something for the children and for the simple-minded, which is the Small Catechism. She also has something for the more advanced, which is the Augsburg Confession. Finally, she has something for the well-read and gifted people, particularly her preachers and teachers, such as the Formula of Concord. By that we do not mean, though, that the congregations should not accept the symbolical books as a whole. No, for there are always among them people whom they can teach and instruct about the Symbols and who will have confidence in them. So when a congregation hears that her pastor is bound to books other than the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession, she still trusts him because she sees that this man always contends for our Catechism, and everything that he draws from the other confessions agrees ever so magnificently with the Catechism.

In the event that a Lutheran congregation wants to call a man to be her pastor but notices in conversation with him that he expresses all sorts of criticisms of Luther and his writings, what will happen then? She will think and say, “That is not the right man for a true Lutheran congregation; we won’t choose him.” Much more will this be the case if he attacks the Book of Concord, for the congregation knows that Luther, Chemnitz, Arndt, Heinrich Müller and others have all held fast to the confessional writings and have bound themselves to teach strictly in accordance with them, and they were all orthodox men of God who also proved themselves many times through their writings to be true guides to eternal life.

When a candidate is sent from us to a new — indeed, still raw — congregation, until now he has always been instructed to demand nothing more than this: that no one can be or become a member of that congregation unless he believes that the Small Catechism contains the pure Christian truth. He also ought to set it forth as desirable that, in addition to this, a confession of the Augsburg Confession ought to be demanded. Should the congregation, however, have reservations about doing the latter because she does not know the Augsburg Confession, he should be satisfied with the former, which is sufficient. From the catechism every congregation can be led through all the other confessions, and when this takes place properly under the direction of a pastor, the congregation will desire on her own in a few years to confess the Augsburg Confession and maybe in ten years the all the Symbols. An analogous situation is what we pastors do in confirmation, that is to say, we require

of the less gifted that they at the very least know the text of the Small Catechism as their confession, but this is not to say that they should not also confess the interpretation.

Here the question came up: if we thus require our congregations to confess (at least indirectly) all of the Symbols, if the servants of our churches are bound to all of the Symbols, do we consider it necessary for other churches, such as the Norwegian Church, for example, to be bound to the Symbols in the same way if we are to recognize them as proper Lutheran churches? Answer: Each of us will agree that when the matter of obligation to all of the Symbols comes to the record, we don't wish to say that a church is not truly Lutheran if she does not proclaim the whole array of our Symbols as her own confession. The Danish-Norwegian Church has not officially adopted the Large Catechism, the Smalcald Articles, or the Formula of Concord as her confession, yet she has always been recognized as a true Lutheran church. Norway was so fortunate that no Crypto-Calvinists, Crypto-Papists, or other fanatics, against whom the Formula of Concord had to be laid down in Germany, caused unrest in her church, though that land was not without a few individual secret Calvinists. If the Danish-Norwegian Church had wished to introduce these confessional writings in the land, she would have been in danger of inducing quarrels and unrest within herself. This is thus the reason why these confessional writings were not officially adopted in that church. It is false and wrong when one so often reads that the Norwegian Church is not so confessionally constituted as the German, for even if all of the Symbols have not been officially adopted there, theologians such as Brockmann, Lassenius, and others demonstrate that the Book of Concord has consistently been looked upon as the book of the Lutheran faith and confession. Incidentally, not only are the faithful Norwegian Lutherans in this country seeking to adopt the whole Book of Concord, but it is currently being translated into Norwegian in Norway.

Endnotes

- 1 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Church Relations in the 21st Century* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2009).
- 2 *Church Relations in the 21st Century*, 5.
- 3 The attempt to form a synod with the constitution approved in 1851 failed because of an error confessional basis (specifically Grundtvigianism) written by Pastor J. W. C. Dietrichson. For this reason, the Synod effectively declared the previous constitution null and void in 1852 and reworked their confessional basis. E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 154–157.
- 4 H. Halvorsen, *Festskrift til Den norske Synodes Jublaeum: 1853-1903* (Decorah: Den norske Synodes Forlag, 1903), 57. All translations from Norwegian and German sources are the author's.
- 5 *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans*, 159.
- 6 *Kirkelig Maanedstidende for den norsk-evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Amerika* (1860), 303–304. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005972940>.
- 7 This is the understanding of the Norwegian Synod's committee that met in October 1859 to consider the issue of adopting the entire Book of Concord, as recorded in *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, 35–37. Indeed, the Book of Concord itself describes most of the other symbols not as documents standing on their own but as the authoritative explanations of the Augsburg Confession, as in Preface 15 and FC SD Rule and Norm 6–7, 13.
- 8 Christian J. Einertson, "Sorrow and Gladness: Norwegian Studies at Concordia College," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 33–44.
- 9 "Delegation der norwegischen Synode; Errichtung einer norwegischen theologischen Professur im Concordia-College zu St. Louis." In *Neunter Synodal-Bericht der allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten vom Jahre 1857*, 53–54. Proceedings, Ft. Wayne, IN. (St. Louis: Synodaldruckerei Von Aug. Wiebusch U. Sohn, 1858).
- 10 Walther and Missouri's relationship to the Formula of Concord specifically is documented in Charles P. Arand, *Historiography of the Lutheran Confessions in America, 1830-1930*, Master's thesis (Concordia Seminary, 1987), 177–188.
- 11 Walther's presentation was specifically on the topic of §21 in this work, which is concerned with how a congregation is to call a pastor. The relevant portion on confessional subscription reads: "In the document of vocation the person chosen is to be bound by the congregation to the Scriptures of the prophets and the apostles of the Old and New Testaments as to God's Word, as also to the public Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and to the faithful administration of the holy ministry of the Word in all its parts." C. F. W. Walther, *Walther on the Church*, trans. John M. Drickamer, Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 136-137.
- 12 "Verhandlung über §21 des Referats von Herrn Prof. Walther über 'die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Ev.-Luth. Ortsgemeinde.'" In *Elfier Synodal-Bericht der allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten vom Jahre 1863*, 30-58. Proceedings, Ft. Wayne, IN. (St. Louis: Synodaldruckerei Von Aug. Wiebusch U. Sohn, 1864).

- 13 "Verhandlung über §21," 42.
- 14 According to the proceedings, Pastor B. J. Muus and Pastor V. Koren were present as delegates. Prof. L. Larsen, Prof. F. A. Schmidt, President H. A. Preus, Pastors N. Brandt, A. B. Hjort, H. P. Duborg, P. A. Rasmussen, N. Amlund, A. Mikkelsen, J. Krohn, O. J. Hagestad, E. F. Magelsen were also present. Pastor L. Björn came late, and Pastor J. A. Ottesen arrived toward the end of the convention after returning from Norway. "3. Namen Der Berathenden." In *Elfte Synodal-Bericht*, 4.
- 15 Perhaps a reference to Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand, a seventeenth-century professor at the University of Copenhagen. cf. John M. Jensen, *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), s.v. "Jasper Rasmussen Brochmand."
- 16 Johann Lassenius, a seventeenth-century Pomeranian theologian who was court preacher in Copenhagen. cf. *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. Erwin R. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), s.v. "Lassenius, Johann(es)."
- 17 *Elfte Synodal-Bericht*, 42.
- 18 C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," trans. Alex. Wm. C. Guebert, *Concordia Theological Monthly* XVIII, no. 4 (April 1947): 241-253, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/WaltherWhySubscribeUnconditionallySymbolical.pdf>.
- 19 *Church Relations in the 21st Century*, 5.
- 20 That translation project would be completed and accessible to the Norwegians in America within a few years of Walther's report. *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, (1867), 133-137.
- 21 Erling Teigen correctly points out that the language of the 1853 constitution amounts to a *quia* subscription to the symbols of the Norwegian Church in Erling T. Teigen 2011. "Quia subscription to the confessions: examining the question of hermeneutical direction." *Logia* 20, no. 2: 8. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 4, 2017). At any rate, the revised constitution that began circulating in 1861 and was approved by the synodical convention of 1865 contained a more unambiguous *quia* subscription in its confessional standard, which in its final form read, "§2. The only source and rule for the Synod's faith and life is God's holy Word, revealed in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. §3. The Synod subscribes to the symbolical books or confessional writings of the Norwegian Lutheran Church because they give a pure and unadulterated statement of the doctrine contained in God's Word. These confessional writings are a) the three old symbols: the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian; b) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; c) Luther's Small Catechism. Note: The reason that the other symbols of the Lutheran Church are not yet considered among the symbolical books of our Synod is only that they are hitherto mostly unknown to our congregations." *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, (1861), 187 and (1865), 69.
- 22 *Kirkelig Maanedstidende* (1860), 37.
- 23 *Kirkelig Maanedstidende* (1861), 230.
- 24 *Elfte Synodal-Bericht*, 40-41.
- 25 As found in "Verhandlung über §21," 39-42.
- 26 For more on the confessional identities of the General Synod and the Iowa Synod and how they compared to that of Walther and the Missourians, cf. Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012).

Historical Deficiencies and Present Needs: A Summons to Interdisciplinary Dialogue

Jordan R. Voges

The second decade of the twenty-first century is drawing to a close. In the realm of the sciences, round-the-clock work continues to discover whatever might fill in the next paradigmatic gap, cure some heretofore fatal disease, or make the tabloid headlines.¹ If the recent past is any indicator, from the discovery of the Higgs Particle at CERN to the enamoring photos of the Pluto system and Ultima Thule by the aptly named New Horizons space probe, science has and will continue to stir excitement in the global public.²

But excitement is not the only thing being stirred up. When it comes to the perception in the U.S. of the interaction between the sciences and the Christian religion, perplexity is on the rise: “Are science and religion at odds with each other? A majority of the public says science and religion often conflict, with nearly six-in-ten adults (59%) expressing this view in newly released findings from a Pew Research Center survey.”³ But here we find an interesting discontinuity between the general American public and what the survey categorized as “white evangelical Protestants.” Whereas the majority of the public saw conflict between religion and science, almost half (49%) of all white evangelical Protestants asserted the opposite: science and religion do not conflict.⁴ The irony is that white evangelical Protestants, while most likely to claim consonance between the two subjects, are also most likely (40%) to purport conflict between their personal beliefs and science; ten percentage points higher than the average U.S. adult (30%) and twenty-four points higher than people who claim to be religiously unaffiliated (16%).⁵ These statistics are evocative: Why is there such a difference in perceptions? If Lutherans—professional and lay—claim any distinction from white evangelical Protestantism, where do they stand on these matters? More generally, what are the dynamics of the encounter between Lutheran theology and the sciences?

Responding to the above questions, while necessary, cannot be the subject of this essay. Even making a start toward that task could fill many more pages than I have to spend here. Rather, the narrower purpose of this essay is to exhort Lutheran theologians to begin engaging in conversation with scientists and their work. This conversation is nothing new to Lutherans. Indeed, as this paper will show, such a

conversation began in the very midst of the Lutheran Reformation. But what started out as an engaging discourse quickly fell into silence, and not for the better. Because it is a conversation that needs to be happening in our present context; because it is a conversation sorely needed by Lutherans who have contributed little in the way of substantive responses to the questions posed above.⁶

This essay will show that there is now a need for Lutheran theologians to reflect on developments in the sciences and to participate in conversations and relationships with those practicing in the scientific fields by examining (1) the gradual slide of Lutheran theologians into apathy toward the developments in the study of the natural world and (2) the presently growing public sense of animosity between Christianity and the sciences. As an aside, and to reiterate a point I will make several times throughout this essay, my goal is not to give answers or solutions to the questions I pose, but, instead, to pose questions that demonstrate a need for conversation. I pray my readers hear my words in the winsome tone of just such an invitation.

The Historic Backdrop: A Slide to Apathy

The present need for renewed interdisciplinary dialogue is predicated on a historic lack of such a dialogue. Consider as a case study the circumstances surrounding paradigm shifts in astronomy over the past several centuries: the shift from the geocentric and geostatic view of the universe, propounded by Ptolemy and the Aristotelians, toward a Copernican and Newtonian heliocentric view. And from there to our current model, envisioned by people like Einstein and Lemaître. We find the starting point of this study in the midst of the Reformation, in the final years and months of Nicolas Copernicus' life (1473–1543).

The relationships between astronomy, theology, and the respective scholars of each field were by no means latent with hostility at that time. Melanchthon himself, in addition to being a leading theologian, was considered—by the standards of the day—to be an authority in natural philosophy (the precursor to the modern sciences).⁷ Furthermore, a student and friend of his—Georg Joachim Rhaeticus (1514–1574)—devoted himself in no small way to the work of the scientific revolutionary.⁸ Rhaeticus was a mathematician and thus, by training, proficient in the study of astronomy. In 1537, at age 23, he was summoned by Melanchthon to fill a chair at the university in Wittenberg. Rhaeticus initially accepted Melanchthon's invitation. But in 1539, shortly after beginning his work, he opted to study under and aid the aging Copernicus in publishing *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*, the book which would make known to the world Copernicus'

heliocentric hypothesis.⁹ Melanchthon always regarded heliocentrism with a degree of tentativeness. Even so, he never revoked the hand of friendship—nor the offer of a teaching position—to Rhaeticus. Indeed, on his return journey in 1541—after *On the Revolutions* was published, after the world was introduced to the astronomical picture Copernicus painted, and after Rhaeticus played a public and pivotal role in the promulgation of the heliocentric hypothesis—Rhaeticus received a letter of recommendation from Duke Albrecht of Prussia, himself having helped fund the project, to the Elector of Saxony and resumed his position at Wittenberg. And more than that, Rhaeticus was immediately promoted to the deanship of the faculty of arts.¹⁰

Not that astronomy's relationship to the Lutheran Reformation was entirely without controversy! Such a survey is hardly complete without mentioning Andreas Osiander (1498–1552). Osiander was a Lutheran clergyman brought on by a printer working in collaboration with Rhaeticus and Copernicus to help in their efforts of publication. History would remember how Osiander inserted his own preface to the 1542 Nuremberg edition of *On the Revolutions*. In it, he anonymously explained that Copernicus' proposition of a heliocentric universe was merely a tool for prediction and, in complete contradiction to what Copernicus thought, not a reflection of reality. Osiander published the work without Copernicus' permission and, according to legend, reading Osiander's preface hastened the ailing Copernicus' death in 1543.¹¹

To be sure, the Copernican picture of the world is the progeny of neither an entirely Roman Catholic nor Lutheran parentage. It is best to see the phenotype of the Copernican revolution as springing from the genetics of the German Renaissance, mixed with some other accidents of history.¹² But there is still no denying the facts that “a Lutheran prince [Albrecht] subsidized the publication of his [Copernicus'] work, that a Lutheran theologian [Osiander] arranged for the printing and that a Lutheran mathematician [Rhaeticus] supervised the printing—a Lutheran mathematician who was second to none in working for the introduction of the new world picture and did not forfeit the friendship of Melanchthon by doing so.”¹³ It seemed as if the relationship between Lutheran theologians and astronomers might have had a bright future. Bright, that is, until a divide began to form as one generation of astronomers and theologians gave way to the next.

Three names come to mind in post-Copernican astronomy. The first two are Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and Tycho Brahe (1546–1601). Galileo made his stunning telescopic observations of Earth's moon and its telluric characteristics, probed the starry depths of the Milky Way, and gazed at stars humanity had yet to

lay eyes on.¹⁴ All these observations and more were compiled by Galileo in March of 1610, with his publishing of *The Starry Messenger*. Galileo came to the astounding conclusion, having witnessed what he later came to call the Medicean stars of Jupiter, that he had discovered four satellites orbiting an extraterrestrial body; impossibilities for the geostatic and geocentric worldview of Ptolemy and Aristotle, and vindications for Copernicus.¹⁵ Tycho Brahe, while opposed to the Copernican hypothesis till the day of his death, likewise aided the felling of the old medieval paradigm by observing variation and change where the supposedly static, unalterable crystalline spheres of the Aristotelians should be.¹⁶

But in this cavalcade of geniuses, it was Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), a former assistant of Brahe, who brought Copernicus' system to maturation. Copernicus was still beholden to certain Aristotelian paradigmatic assumptions. For example: that the revolutions of the planets were perfectly circular, always equidistant from the sun, always moving at the same speed. Kepler—the German-born Lutheran astronomer—altered these assertions and posited, instead and based on meticulous astronomical observations, his three renowned laws of planetary motion. Summarily put, these laws maintain that planets, moons, and all satellites orbit not in perfect circles but in ellipses around a focal point (e.g., the Sun, Jupiter, etc.), speeding up or slowing down but always encompassing the same area in the same amount of time.¹⁷

Among post-Reformation theologians, however, interest in the burgeoning discoveries was underwhelming and lackadaisical, in contrast to the example of the earlier Melancthon. On the one hand, some Lutheran theologians, such as Cort Aslaksson (1564–1624) and Melchior Nikolai (1578–1659), saw a certain level of consonance between the emerging views in astronomy and the biblical picture of the cosmos. Aslaksson was a professor at Copenhagen and, like Kepler, had studied as an assistant to Tycho Brahe. While, like Brahe, Aslaksson remained unaccepting of heliocentrism, he was open to an integration between the astronomical findings of his day and theology. Nikolai, by contrast, wholeheartedly accepted the Copernican system, asserting the Bible spoke phenomenologically about matters concerning astronomy and not literalistically.¹⁸ On the other hand, a small group of Lutheran theologians, best identified with the likes of Abraham Calov (1612–1686), spurned the heliocentric view as anti-scriptural and hazardous to the faith.¹⁹ Yet—and this point is pivotal for our case study—these three figures were *oddities*. “Among the great majority of the Lutheran theologians of the post-Reformation era there was relative indifference and ignorance of the new scientific world pictures which were being set forth.”²⁰ Most theologians simply did not care. Perhaps we can ascribe their *laissez-faire* attitude to a perceived silence in Scripture concerning the formulation of an astronomically significant worldview. At the very least, “[i]t is clear that they did

not consider it incumbent upon them to favor or reject on theological grounds any of the cosmological hypotheses of their day.”²¹ The divide which then formed was the progeny not of angst and anger, but of apathy.

We should acknowledge the Bible’s general silence on many things, including much of what we would call the sciences. But it is just such silences that Christians and, vocationally, pastors and theologians are called to investigate and speak into while admitting what they do not and cannot know. And so, we must ask: Is the silence and apathy—tending toward ignorance—of the many Lutheran theologians in the years since Copernicus so innocuous? Before we think the pious reticence of the post-Reformation Lutheran theologians too distant from the present moment and therefore innocent of danger, let us turn and consider the end of our timeline in the early decades of the twentieth-century.

Our case study culminates with the work of two people: Francis Pieper (1852–1932) and Edwin Hubble (1889–1953). In the first volume of his *Christian Dogmatics*, published together with the other two volumes in 1924, Pieper rejected the Copernican system as unacceptable. But more than personally rejecting Copernicus, Pieper made an explicit point of establishing the theological integrity of his hearers based on their agreement with him on this issue: “It is unworthy of a Christian to interpret Scripture, which he knows to be God’s own Word, according to human opinions, and that includes the Copernican cosmic system, or to have others thus to interpret Scripture to him.”²² Although the quote is plucked from a broader theological argument and context, the point is still made that Pieper, in 1924, publicly rejected the concept of the Earth orbiting the Sun and used his authority to bind the consciences of his hearers and establish or revoke the legitimacy of theologians based on their agreement with him on this point.

Edwin Hubble published something in December of that same year. Hubble had been accumulating data on Cepheid variable stars at the Mount Wilson Observatory in California, where he had worked since 1919.²³ Put simply, these stars are important because they emit a consistent luminosity. Furthermore, the distances between several Cepheid variable stars and the Earth had been calculated at the time by way of parallax. These two facts put together—a known luminosity of a consistently luminous type of star coupled with the known distance of several Cepheid variables—meant that Hubble could calculate the distance of any Cepheid variable to Earth based on its luminosity.²⁴ What Hubble discovered in the data and made known to the world at the end of 1924 was a Cepheid variable star in what had previously been called the Andromeda Nebula. Calculating its distance based on the stars luminosity, “Hubble estimated its distance to be approximately 900,000 light-

years. Since this was much greater than the size of the Milky Way system [in light years], it appeared that the Andromeda Nebula must be another galaxy outside our own.”²⁵ There were not only countless stars beyond our solar system and within the Milky Way—many, in all likelihood, with their own satellites—now it was known that there were innumerable galaxies far beyond the Milky Way.

What happened in those intervening centuries which so dissuaded Lutheran theologians from keeping a finger on the pulse of the sciences? What made Pieper commit himself so strongly to the fringe-position of geocentricity and condemn those who disagreed with him and yet still wished to be faithful Christians? What were the catalysts? Many of the reasons are beyond the purview of this paper (e.g. the lack of Lutheran church patronage for ventures into understanding the natural world as opposed to English and Roman Christianity). But it is valid to say what led in part to Pieper’s claims was a historical trend: a lack of initiative from Lutheran theologians to engage the wider world of the sciences in constructive dialogue; a tradition of apathy and borderline ignorance toward fields deemed non-vital to theology.

The Present Perspective: A Growing Animosity

Putting positive construction on Lutheran theologians of the past, it is easy enough to say their silence in the conversation was warranted; there were surely other, more pressing matters in Germany than the emerging sciences and the lack of dialogue produced no large amount of public criticism. But even if that construction is illusory, the luxury of cultural amiability, especially on matters of the sciences, is nonexistent at present. Subjects such as the origin of the universe and of life on earth, global warming and climate change due to human activity, and the vaccination of children regularly make headlines and are integral parts of American education and life.²⁶ For example: concerning the topic of evolution, the same Pew study mentioned above found an extreme difference of opinion between white evangelical Protestants (36% accept it in some form) over against Roman Catholics (69%), white mainline Protestants (71%), and seculars (86%).²⁷ Such a difference alone should warrant energetic conversation. It demonstrates the need for engaging the wider thinking within the church and beyond. This need is magnified even more so in the case of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, since, based on further Pew data, 52% of its congregation members think human life evolved from a common ancestor of other primates. This is an anomaly given their general proximity to white evangelical Protestants on many other cultural matters.²⁸ Yet the question remains: Where is the conversation? Why are we not acknowledging and engaging this discrepancy? Let me be clear: I mean no controversy in presenting this data. Rather, I am pointing out how the discrepancies demonstrate that what we have is an opportunity for charitable and faithful conversation.

A similar note resonates in and around the subjects of climate change and the requirement of childhood vaccination. While 50% of American adults think the Earth is warming due to human activity, only 28% of white evangelical Protestants would say so.²⁹ Likewise, white evangelical Protestants hold the highest dissenting percentage among the groups surveyed concerning the requirement that parents vaccinate their children: 39% of white evangelical Protestants say parents should be able to decide, whereas 30% of other U.S. adults would say the same.³⁰ Although nine percentage points may not seem like much, it is curious that the dissenting group of white evangelical Protestants should be higher than any other group surveyed. The difference is even more striking looking back at the analysis of opinions on climate change and evolution. Why is it that people from that demographic of Christianity (white evangelical Protestants) differ so greatly from their fellow Christians and from their fellow Americans on these and many more matters in the realm of the sciences? There are many more questions which can and ought to be asked and this paper is no place to even begin such an intensive investigation. Rather—to state the thesis again—this information and these questions are being presented to show the need for a dialogue that Lutherans are not having. Perhaps if such a conversation were to occur, the reasons and nuances behind the whys and hows would become clearer, and perhaps certain answers and observations concerning Christianity’s approach to the picture of the world presented by the sciences will be either justified, reformed, or put down. But one cannot say definitively because quietude or perhaps apathy is the present status quo.

If the statistics are not enough to shake Lutheran theologians from their apathetic slumber, then perhaps the more vociferous cries from the New Atheists can. Continuing the theme of astronomy from earlier, Daniel Dennet in his popular book, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life*, lights on a decontextualized statement by one of the reformers concerning Copernicus: “Philipp Melanchthon, a collaborator of Martin Luther, opined that ‘some Christian prince’ should suppress this madman [Copernicus].”³¹ Is this an adumbration of how Dennet wishes to portray the engagement of all Christians with the new discoveries of science? (Probably!) Or consider the words of the late Christopher Hitchens at the outset of his book, *god is Not Great*: “As I write these words, and as you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction, and the destruction of all the hard-won human attainments that I have touched upon. Religion poisons everything.”³² If one were to include the sciences in those “hard-won human attainments,” then Hitchens is saying Christianity opposes scientific enquiry and development. Is he right?

Conclusion

The above citations from the New Atheists are easily refuted by an adequate theological (and historical) reflection, but what theologians in the Lutheran tradition have taken the time for such reflection and to explain these facts to the scientific community, to the public at large, or—more importantly—to congregations and pastors? Furthermore, these quotes are meager in comparison to the many pages that follow them! Here again, one is left wanting for voices from the Lutheran tradition in the conversation. Others have made themselves heard, substantively or not (e.g., Alvin Plantinga, Allister McGrath, John Lennox, Francis Collins, and Ken Ham to name a few), but where are the Lutherans?³³

Apathy and disengagement are not responsible courses of action given the present context. Many of our Lutheran forefathers (e.g., Melancthon and Rhaeticus), and the universities where they taught and were educated, saw the joy and importance of conversing with the explorers and investigators of God's creation. It was when theologians ceased to concern themselves with the developments of natural philosophy and, later, the sciences that a divide began to form, culminating in a prominent theologian making an authoritative and inaccurate scientific and theological assertion (i.e. Pieper). So, shall we continue with this uncritical disinterest and let others discuss the questions of science and the Christian faith? Or shall we Lutherans capitalize on our distinctive confessional and theological strengths, part with past trends, remove whatever our present blinders might be, and, trusting in the guidance of the Spirit, seek a revitalized conversation with the practitioners and findings of the sciences along with our other Christian brothers and sisters? This paper prescribes the latter option. The next question is: How?

Endnotes

- 1 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24.
- 2 Adrian Cho, "Higgs Boson Positively Identified," *Science.com*, March 14th, 2013, <http://www.sciencemag.org.csl.idm.oclc.org/news/2013/03/higgs-boson-positively-identified> (accessed May 11th, 2016); Hannah Devlin, "Pluto: Nasa reveals first high-resolution images of planet's surface," *The Guardian.com*, July 16th, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jul/15/pluto-mission-nasa-reveals-first-high-resolution-images-of-planets-surface> (accessed May 11th, 2016).
- 3 Cary Funk and Becka Alper, *Religion and Science: Highly Religious Americans are Less Likely than Others to See Conflict between Faith and Science*, U.S.: Pew Research Center (2015), 4.
- 4 Only among Hispanic Catholics is the percentage of people who sense consonance between religion and science is higher than white evangelical Protestants (50%), according to Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 4.
- 5 Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 15.
- 6 An exception would be *Together with All Creatures*, put out in 2010 by the LCMS Commission for Theology and Church Relations.
- 7 Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, St. Louis: Concordia (2003), 417.
- 8 Melanchthon was of several minds on Copernicus. For example, he wrote once to Burkard Mithobius, in 1541, "Surely wise rulers should restrain the impudence of clever persons [e.g., Copernicus]." On the other hand, in a commemorative address honoring Kaspar Cruciger eight years later, in 1549, he said, "Moved by these and similar observations, we have begun to admire and love Copernicus more." With the limits of this paper, one thing is worth noting: Melanchthon's primary reason for being suspect of Copernicus was not doctrinal or theological. Rather, it was humanistic. Copernicus was moving beyond the antiquity of Aristotle, maintaining—contrary to popular opinion—that the ancients were not the measure of all knowledge. This notion must initially have bordered on anarchic for Melanchthon. See Elert, *Structure*, 417-419
- 9 Elert, *Structure*, 424-425.
- 10 Rhaeticus deserves a twofold honor. On the one hand, he was the only proper student of Copernicus. On the other hand, according to Owen Gingrich, without Rhaeticus' "persuasive intervention" Copernicus likely never would have published his theses. Owen Gingerich, "The Copernican Revolution," in Gary B. Ferngren, *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, (2017), 89. Elert, *Structure*, 421.
- 11 Phil Dowe, *Galileo, Darwin, and Hawking*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2005), 40-41. Elert, *Structure*, 421. This view is otherwise known as "instrumentalism."
- 12 Elert, *Structure*, 423.
- 13 Elert, *Structure*, 423. "At the very time the new world picture had to pass through the gravest crisis as a result of the papal index of 1612 Wilhelm Schickard was teaching the Copernican system at Tübingen in addition to Maestlin, his fellow countryman; Ambrosius Rhodius was teaching it at Wittenberg; Organus, the Silesian, was teaching it at Frankfurt an der Oder; Bernegger, the zealous Lutheran who came from Austria, and, somewhat later, Nikolaus Reimers, from Dithmarschen, were teaching it at Strassburg; and Peter Cruger, the Prussian, was teaching it at Danzig. Here and there this was certainly embarrassing to their theological colleagues, who for a long time probably still understood no more about the astronomical bases of the Copernican system than Luther did. But if the

- Copernican teaching had been regarded as heresy in the Lutheranism of that time, the practice of the time guarantees that exactly the same measure would have been taken against it that were taken by Rome." Elert, 426–427.
- 14 "I have been led to the opinion and conviction that the surface of the moon is not smooth, uniform, and precisely spherical as a great number of philosopher believe it (and the other heavenly bodies) to be but is uneven, rough, and full of cavities and prominences, being not unlike the face of the earth, relieved by chains of mountains and deep valleys." Quoted by Todd Timmons, *Makers of Western Science*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company (2012), 24.
- 15 Timmons, *Makers*, 24–27.
- 16 Timmons, *Makers*, 40–41.
- 17 Timmons, *Makers*, 43–44.
- 18 Preus, Robert, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: God and His Creation*, vol. 2, St. Louis: Concordia (1972), 230.
- 19 Preus, *Post-Reformation*, 229.
- 20 Preus, *Post-Reformation*, 235.
- 21 Preus, *Post-Reformation*, 235.
- 22 Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, volume 1, St. Louis: Concordia (1950), 473.
- 23 Michael A. Hoskin, "Hubble-Edwin," *The Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 14, Connecticut: Grolier (1992), 519.
- 24 This is, of course, a simplification, but the point is still valid. Such stars and astronomical phenomena are known to contemporary astronomers as "standard candles" and are still used to judge interstellar distances.
- 25 M. W. Fr., "The Physical Sciences: Astronomy," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 25 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005), 836.
- 26 Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 19.
- 27 Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 19.
- 28 "Religious Landscape Study: Members of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod," *Pew Research Center*, accessed May 11th, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/>.
- 29 Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 33.
- 30 Funk and Alper, *Religion*, 28.
- 31 Daniel Dennet, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, New York: Penguin (1995), page 19. The same quote can be found above in note 8 of this essay alongside another, more amicable quote by Melanchthon concerning Copernicus.
- 32 Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great*, New York: Twelver (2007), 13.
- 33 E.g.: Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*; Allister McGrath, *The Territories of Human Reason*; John Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?*; Francis Collins, *The Language of God*; Ken Ham, *The Lie*.

Poetry

Luther's Small Haiku

Jaron Melin

Prelude

As the head teaches,
The family listens too
In a simple way.

The Ten Commandments

Keep the Ten Commands:
Three for Him, Seven for Men.
Fear, love, and trust God.

The Creed

Father creates all.
Jesus, true God, true man, saves.
Spirit calls His church.

The Lord's Prayer

Father in heaven,
Do come among us also
In Word and life too.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Water with the Word
Father, Son, Holy Spirit
Washing and saving.

Confession

Confess all your sins.
In the light of Christ's command,
You are forgiven.

The Sacrament of the Altar

Jesus' body and
Blood given and shed for you
In the bread and wine.

Daily Prayers

Morning and Evening
Asking blessings, giving thanks
Pray without ceasing

Table of Duties

Love your neighbors well
According to your calling.
Persevere in pray'r.

Postlude

Let each his lesson
Learn with great care, And all the
Household well shall fare.

No. 1451, Groaning

Garrick (Ricky) Sinclair Beckett

To them disaster is an enigma, —
when Earth flushes the ocean
upon humanity in whirlwind atrocity.
And when with shouted quakes
she shatters our foundation, leaving us
in remnants of brokenness.
Such disaster bequeaths itself to Man,
who courts with the Devil's mistress,
quaking a community with lead.
Some then march in with aid
and thunder political affirmations;
and when the storm subsides,
disaster fades into obscurity.

Consider Beckmann's *Scene from the Destruction of Messina*:
Earth shouted her quake, clasping 80,000 souls.
Bodies broken and limbs marred amongst ensuing chaos,
casualties duel whilst a police officer arrives for aid,
only to wrestle a man frothing in chaos.
A woman's breasts lay bare, nude against a bleeding man,
head downcast and breathless mouth agape.
Death sighs across the grey terrain,
tripping men who cripple towards shelter.

Such a history lies distilled in a painting,
but who remembers such a tragedy?
Like the officer, we come to aid,
instead bashing victims with authority self-proclaimed,
ignoring the bare woman sunken in despair,
trampling over corpses in our political boots,
only to forget the disaster in a fortnight.



This is an ekphrastic poem. An ekphrasis is a poem about a painting. This particular poem is about the same painting mentioned in the second stanza by Max Beckmann (1884-1950). Beckmann created this painting in 1909, which was a year after a massive earthquake in Messina, Italy that killed about 80,000 people. Additionally, although the painting was not based on Scripture but an actual event, this painting made me think of Romans 8:22-23, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Max Beckmann, German, 1884–1950; *Scene from the Destruction of Messina*, 1909; oil on canvas; 100 1/4 x 105 3/8 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Bequest of Morton D. May 837:1983; © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

© 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

A Triptych of Hymns based on the metaphors for the Reign of God found in Dr. Voelz's *What Does This Mean?* Addendum 11-B.

Kyle Ronchetto

Suggested Tune: Rathburn

Though the battle is not ended,
victory remains secure.
When life's trials are extended,
we follow our leader dear.

Our foe rages still against us,
full of guile and full of hate,
seeking some way to prevent us
from approaching heaven's gate.

But our champion showed his power,
wounded deep our ancient foe.
This he did in that dark hour
on the cross so long ago.

Though now seems the tempter's hour,
his might shall not last the night.
Jesus shall come forth in power –
by his rule make all things right.

“Come quickly, Lord,” is what we pray,
“reign to eternity.”

Suggested Tune: Dorothy

Christ already is victorious –
already is all fulfilled.
All salvation is won for us –
sinful nature has been killed.

Law and prophets pointed to him
as the perfect, priestly king.
In their songs the people knew him,
and his praises all did sing.

What he did was as was written
in the ancient scriptures true:
by the law's sting was he smitten,
as the prophets all foreknew.

Suggested Tune: Nun Danket All

The new world comes behind the old
still hidden for a time.

The new world does not yet unfold
its wondrousness sublime.

When Christ had come, he preached God's Word
to bring the reign of heav'n.

The blind then saw, the deaf then heard,
the dead then lived again.

But there are eyes which cannot see
and ears which cannot hear.

They do not know the blessings free
which still are drawing near.

And so, we wait for that great day
when all unveiled will be.

All the law's demands were ended –
all the promises are here.

Christ his broken world has mended
by his resurrection dear.

Narrative

Burying Jeremiah

Adelphos Mikroteros

“I never get to see you anymore,” Lydia let out in a frustrated groan.

“Are you kidding?” Jeremiah asked. “You’re literally seeing me right now. You see me for almost the whole time I’m here.”

“But you’re hardly ever here!” Lydia responded.

“It’s not my fault that work has me traveling so much. You know that I would stay here more if I could.”

Lydia put her head down like a child who was just scolded and responded softly as she grabbed her necklace moving the cross back and forth, “You’re right, there’s nothing you can do about it.” At this she turned and walked toward the living room, and sat down on the couch facing away from him.

Jeremiah knew better than to think that she believed those words, he gathered his thoughts as quickly as he could. “Come on. You don’t actually expect me to quit my job. Do you?”

“If it meant that you were here more,” she replied before the words fell out of his mouth with her frustration rising once more.

“Then what? A teacher’s salary is not going to pay the mortgage.” Jeremiah looked down at Lydia as she faced away from him. Her short brown hair was just enough to block him from seeing the tears coming out of her kind brown eyes, but he didn’t need to see those tears to know that they were there. His hard demeanor broke as he came closer to her. “Lydia,” he started as he took her small cold hands and enveloped them in his own. “If I quit my job that means we leave behind this beautiful house; we go back to eating out just one night a month; and it means that pretty necklace around your pretty little neck is the last one you’re going to see for a long time.”

Lydia turned to him and looked through the flood of her eyes into his now calm blue eyes. “That’s okay. How many times do I have to tell you that stuff doesn’t matter to me?” This time her response carried much less frustration. There was hope

in her voice; she was comforted by his suddenly calm demeanor. It sounded like she believed that after the countless number of conversations they had about Jeremiah quitting his job over the past year this one would change his mind. She began to reach for his shaggy brown hair to run her fingers through it like she had a hundred times before.

Jeremiah slowly put his hands over his face. He remembered that there was a time in which his wife seemed to be reasonable. He thought of her as the most practical woman he had ever met, but since he was promoted a year ago, she hasn't stopped nagging him about his job. What is logical about cutting off the family's main source of income? At first Jeremiah didn't like it any more than she did. He hated the airplanes and the lonely hotel rooms. He hated that half of his co-workers threw their morals out the window when their wives weren't around. Above all, he hated being away from his beautiful wife, and the preparations that she was making for their child. The difference between him and Lydia is that Jeremiah adjusted. He adapted to the fact that he could only sleep with his wife half of the time, and unlike many of his co-workers, he never looked for another woman to warm the bed the other half of the time. He learned to ignore his co-workers chiding him about his faithfulness to his wife. He even came to love the work that he was doing even more. After all he was the Vice President of Health and Safety for a quarter of the chemical plants in the United States. He was doing important work, not to mention the fact that he supported Lydia, and he was planning to support their baby boy.

Then the miscarriage happened. Only four months ago, they lost their child before either of them got to hold him. His name was going to be Hosea. It broke their hearts. At times Jeremiah would walk up the stairs only to find his wife crying in the old nursery. That was too much for him. He was supposed to be the provider and protector of his family and there was nothing he could do about this, so he worked. He provided because he failed to protect.

"Jeremiah," Lydia said, gently running her fingers through his hair. "I'm serious. I would rather live with you on a budget than without you."

"But you don't have to do either!" Jeremiah exploded. "You have me, and we aren't living on a ridiculous budget anymore! I've worked hard to get here, and I've done it for you and for..." He trailed off, and his tone became gentle once again, "We are going to have a child. I want to be ready when that happens."

"And we will be," Lydia insisted, "but we can still be ready if you quit your job."

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jeremiah answered under his breath as he stood up and walked away. He could not believe how selfish she was being. She would throw away all of the preparations for the arrival of their child that they had worked so hard for just to spend more time with him. The time they spent together didn’t even seem to be worth anything anymore. Every minute that they spent together seemed to be spent crying or fighting. As he turned to leave the room, he heard a whimper coming from the couch. He froze. It broke his heart to hear his wife cry, but he refused to be swayed by an emotional eruption. He put his hand on his face again as if he was trying to wipe the sympathy from it. With a deep sigh he took another step and made his way toward the bedroom.

Before the night was over Jeremiah would have to confront his wife again, but he simply needed some time to be alone. He needed some time to think. He sat down on the bed with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. The bedroom always proved to be a good place to think. The dark blue walls had a calming influence on him. He looked up at the cherry wardrobe that he bought just a month after his promotion. He was taken aback by how well it fit this room. It was so practical. Jeremiah needed a place to hang his dress clothes, because the closet was mostly full of his wife’s clothes, with the rest of the space being taken up by an unassembled crib, and a diaper changing table. Not only could he hang all his dress clothes, but in the drawers underneath them he could keep his jeans, t-shirts, sweat pants, underwear, socks, and athletic shorts. What couldn’t this wardrobe hold? It was perfect, but it cost \$900. It was because of his job that he could afford it. It was because of his job that he could afford everything in their house. He couldn’t imagine his life without all of those things. Could Lydia really imagine hers without them? Of course she couldn’t! It was a struggle for Lydia when they were paying off both of their student loans. She always used to complain about cooking dinner, but now she hardly ever does, because they go out almost every night that Jeremiah is home.

Jeremiah stood up and walked towards the wardrobe admiring its craftsmanship. He opened it up rubbing his hand along the wood. It was so smooth yet so sturdy. He had put some things that most would consider junk on the top drawer of the dresser, but to him they were once the most valuable things he owned. As he scanned the top shelf, there was something just beyond the light that had poured into the wardrobe when he opened the door. He reached to the back and grabbed a shell. When he recognized it, it grew heavy in his hand. So heavy that he could not bear the weight; the shell dragged him to his knees.

It transported him back to the day that Lydia brought this shell to him when he was sick on their honeymoon. He couldn’t leave the room that day, because despite what Lydia told him, he decided to drink the tap water.

It transported him back to the day that Lydia brought this shell to him when he was sick on their honeymoon. He couldn't leave the room that day, because despite what Lydia told him, he decided to drink the tap water. Even though he was incapacitated, he insisted that Lydia go have fun without him. She wasn't gone for an hour before she came back saying that if she couldn't take him to the beach, she would bring the beach to him. It was the whitest shell that he had ever seen. It was unaffected by any tint of the sand, and even now it was still untouched by age. It was as white as Lydia's wedding dress except for the three blue drops of water shaped like tear drops that were painted on it by one of the locals.

As Jeremiah knelt on the floor bent over the shell tear drops began to stream out of his eyes. He remembered how gentle she was with him when he was the weaker half. Not only did she stay back and spend the entire day with him, but she reminded him of his worth. She probably wanted to tell him, "I told you so," when Jeremiah got sick by doing exactly what she said not to do. She probably wanted to go to the beach and get a tan. She probably wanted to go to that fancy restaurant where they had a reservation. Instead, she stayed with Jeremiah and talked about whatever kept his mind off the convulsions that seized his stomach.

Now his diaphragm convulsed as he gasped for breath between his silent sobs. Jeremiah's eyes were opened. He realized that he was the selfish one. He realized that his vocation is not to be somewhere else trying to save the world, but it is side-by-side with his wife trying to save his marriage. Jeremiah realized that for the past year he has been playing the role of the selfless provider who went to work every day, but he was really the selfish outsider who tried to run away. He traveled, because it was better than facing the reality of a miscarried child and a wife that cried all the time.

Amid his silent sobs, thoughts of quitting his job tied his stomach in a knot. Now he realized that his job wasn't just about the income for his family — it was consistent. He was consistent there. No matter what happened, if there was a chemical spill or an employee injury Jeremiah was a calm, level-headed leader. Everyone he worked with knew that, and they counted on him for it. He would be letting them down. As reality began to set in, and the pain moved from his heart to his stomach, his sobs subsided. He grabbed his head firmly with one hand as if he could squeeze a decision out of it. He was going to let someone down. Would it be his wife or his work?

As much as Jeremiah wanted to sit there for the rest of night to deliberate, he knew that he had to go back and face his wife, who probably assumed that he was

going to come down and apologize to her and promise that it would get better soon like he had every time before. What he meant by that he didn't know. The baby wasn't coming back. If he got promoted to President of Health and Safety he would probably travel just as much. What about Lydia? How would she feel after a little while longer? Would she feel better after her "irrational emotions" faded or would she persist as she had for the past four months?

Jeremiah wiped some drying tears from his face as he slowly rose to stand. He turned to the wardrobe and closed the door; leaning towards it until his head touched the beautiful cherry. Then he looked down at the shell in his one hand as he stroked the door of the wardrobe with his other. He paused for a long moment, then pushed away from the wardrobe and buried the shell in his pocket.

"God, help me," he muttered to himself. After hesitating one last time, he left the room to meet his wife.

Opinion

Funerals: Typical Planning and a Typological Sermon

Rev. Joshua H. Jones

Like many other aspects of our culture, the landscape of planning and officiating funerals seems to have changed quite rapidly over the last decade. That is not to say that many of the things happening today were not present previously. However, the intensity and frequency of what we might call “challenging funerals” appears to have escalated. In what follows, I hope to provide a brief sketch of the anatomy of what may be encountered in funeral planning, as well as some proposals for how Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors might faithfully handle some of the challenging aspects of ministering to the families and friends of the deceased. In the second half of this article, I will also provide a rationale for, and explanation of, what might best be described as a typological funeral sermon which I believe may be useful for current and future pastors.

I expect with the aging demographic in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, these matters will become all the more important. Even now, in my ministry as a sole pastor, funeral sermons have encompassed between eight and fifteen percent of my preaching in any given year. I do not expect the percentage to decrease for several years. There are probably many others more qualified to write such an article. I write this with a pastoral heart and submit it to readers as one who has been wrestling with these matters for over ten years. I do not claim to have all the answers, but I hope my thoughts might spur some serious conversation among seminarians and even professors as they consider one of the most wonderful and difficult aspects of our callings: funerals.

Typical Planning

Pastor Williams sat down with the funeral director and two adult children of his deceased parishioner. It did not take long for the fledgling pastor to become uncomfortable. Before his arrival, the family had already discussed dividing up the ashes of their mother and putting them in lockets for the grandchildren with matching ash-filled clocks for the themselves; there would be no burial. The service would be a “celebration of life” with no sad, mournful sentiments because mom was in a better place and that is what she

would have wanted. The family also desired the service be held at the funeral home and to revolve around the eulogizing of their mother. Finally, the music selections were to include "Amazing Grace," "Danny Boy," and "Wind Beneath My Wings," none of which would include the voices of participants.

It would be nice if such a situation was far-fetched or even uncommon. It is not. While one may not encounter all of the ideas expressed in the opening paragraph it has been rare in my ministry not to experience at least two of the above expressions in any given funeral planning session. And there are also times when you really do get a situation exactly like the one above. Families tend to treat clergy and churches much like they do funeral homes: as providers of goods and services who exist to cater to one's every wish and desire. Consumerism runs the show whether clergy and churches like it or not. Thomas Long argues convincingly that the "cultural and generational shift toward experimentation, customization, and personalization has impacted the social network of death customs and the Christian funeral along with it."¹ What do we do? How do we respond? How might we minister to families who may be nominally Christian at best?

Two easy answers come to mind. The first is to capitulate to the consumeristic mindset of the culture and give families whatever they want. I would suggest this option should be rejected. However, one should not dismiss the temptation to "go along to get along" out of hand. It is a real temptation pastors may face. This is because most pastors know that arguing with the family members of the deceased while planning a funeral is not helpful nor is it ideal for family members to be angry with the man who is seeking to comfort them. These realities also inform my proposal that wholesale rejection of a family's desires would not be helpful either. While there may be some things that a pastor believes he should not waffle on, there are also likely some ways that he can provide outlets for what the family desires that are not going to interfere with a Christian funeral service. A "my way or the highway" approach may likewise be tempting. There may even be some difficult situations in which a pastor must finally recommend the family use a different clergy member (I have only had to do this one time). In my own experience there is usually some middle ground to be considered and explored which would allow the pastor to have a clear conscience as he plans and officiates a Christian funeral as well as an opportunity to guide the family toward something that hopefully can be in keeping with Christianity.

Certainly, there is much that could be said regarding how one handles sometimes bizarre funeral service requests. I would offer one overarching piece of advice: plan ahead with your members regarding their funerals while they are still

alive. Family members generally still respect the wishes of the deceased, sometimes above all else. Guiding the planning before the funeral occurs can help to decrease the frequency of difficult funeral planning sessions. Jot notes down while you are making calls, or spend some time afterward to make notes. And as sad as it may be, having something in writing from your parishioner may be necessary. You could encourage your parishioner to talk with his or her family about funeral plans such as hymn selections, etc. You may even offer your help to guide the discussion. Of course, this advice assumes the pastor is making regular visits to his members.

I believe most families simply desire to honor their deceased loved one and want the pastor to genuinely care. This is partially why saying “no” to eulogies or certain songs can be so upsetting to someone who may already be highly emotional. In our age of entitlement, saying “no” may carry the connotation of being uncaring. Sometimes offering alternatives to a family’s preferences can soften the blow of a firm “no.” For example, in the opening story, I may ask the family to consider playing “Danny Boy” and “Wind Beneath My Wings” during a visitation at the funeral home the day before the funeral. We could then sing “Amazing Grace” at the funeral and perhaps, if I have done my homework, I could suggest two more hymns their loved one enjoyed singing to be sung as congregational hymns during the funeral service.

While a consumer mentality toward pastors and churches in the funeral planning process may be lamentable, it is also likely unsurprising. Strange funeral requests are merely the outgrowth of such a consumer approach. Even recently there was a story in the national news about a Roman Catholic priest getting into trouble because of the way he handled the funeral sermon of a young man who committed suicide. I do not specifically know what the sermon entailed and I am not defending the priest. But I think it is telling that at least from the point of view of the press, the real scandal was not the priest’s theological convictions but that he failed to give the family what they desired.

It should be noted that the funeral practices of most LCMS pastors are in the minority even when compared to other church bodies. For example, eulogies tend to be included in most funerals people attend, whether they are entirely secular or officiated by a clergy member from another church body. And eulogies are the primary sticking point at nearly every funeral planning session in which I have participated. I recognize that there may be some disagreement regarding this practice even among LCMS clergy. I prefer that families not speak publicly to eulogize their loved ones during the funeral service. I tell them so up front. But I have found two ways to soften my clear and explicit “no.” First, I suggest that the family and friends

of the deceased could share their memories and sentiments during a visitation or wake instead of during the funeral service. Second, I invite the family to aid me in writing a portion of the funeral sermon.

A Typological Funeral Sermon

There are different ideas about what makes a good funeral sermon. While such a discussion is worthwhile, I will not delve very deeply into the matter here.² My goal in sharing the contours of a typological funeral sermon stems from the reality that I was not really taught how to craft a funeral sermon. To be clear, I am not blaming anyone for this. I do hope, however, that this structure or template might prove useful, especially to new pastors. My aim is not to offer something perfect. Instead, I hope readers will evaluate what follows and modify it to suit their unique callings as they see fit. What immediately follows, then, includes some aspects of a funeral sermon that I believe are necessary and important so that my assumptions are clear.

Since the Christian community is gathered because of the death of one of their own and because of the death *and* resurrection of Jesus, my goal in preaching a funeral sermon is to speak truthfully about the deceased and about Jesus. Like most ordinary sermons, I believe Law and Gospel ought to be proclaimed. Some believe that funerals are for the living; others believe they are for the deceased. I see this as a false dichotomy; instead, a funeral is *both* for the living *and* for the deceased. Like other sermons, funeral sermons utilize a text from Scripture. Finally, I assume the primary problem people are facing at a funeral is death and the state of grief³ (acknowledged or not) that death leaves in its wake. Thus, the hope of the resurrection must be proclaimed at every funeral.

To accomplish these things, I am proposing what one might call a typological funeral sermon (see Figure 1). It utilizes the words, emotions, and sentiments of family members and the pastor as well as the truth revealed in sacred Scripture. What I offer below attempts to take into account many of the challenges mentioned above and aims for a middle ground of sorts that I believe is both faithful to the Scriptures and satisfactory to grieving families. It also aims to account for what I believe is the primary problem for funeral practices in American Christianity: the conscious or subconscious desire to avoid grief.

Figure 1. *Typological Funeral Sermon Structure*

- I. **A** Law: Speaking of the Deceased with Typological Phrase
- II. **B** Naming Reason for Grief: Death because of Sin

- III. C Transition to Anti-type
- IV. A' Gospel: Speaking of Christ with Typological Phrase and Scriptural Text
- V. B' Naming Reason for Hope: Resurrection because of Christ

It may be a foregone conclusion on the seminary grounds that death is bad. But not everyone thinks that way. In approximately 90% of the funerals I officiate, the family specifically requests that the service be an occasion to celebrate the life of the deceased. Neo-platonic ideas reveal themselves most clearly at funerals and are very present in LCMS congregations. LCMS pastors, however, should know that death is bad. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that death is an enemy. According to our Lord in Matthew 5:4, it is specifically those who mourn who will be comforted. Families and friends of the dead need to mourn. They need to grieve in hope and not as others do who have none (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Avoiding grief by celebrating life misses the mark. Nevertheless, a funeral is not the venue to argue about correct theology. A funeral is the venue for pastors to proclaim correct theology.

I suspect many people who have had a loved one die struggle to identify why they are sad. That may sound like a strange statement but after a long illness or significant suffering families may in some sense be relieved their loved one is no longer suffering. Additionally, when their loved one is “in a better place” as it is often said—why should they be sad? Some of my parishioners have shared that they feel guilty when feeling sad because they suspect they are being selfish. So, they feel like they should avoid grief. Instead, they attempt to celebrate life because their loved one is no longer suffering, etc. But they cry. They hurt. And they often do not know why. We do know why: death is an enemy. Death simply cannot be an occasion for a celebration of life. People will cry. People will end up grieving whether they want to or not. We need to tell them why. We need to name it, to call it what it is.

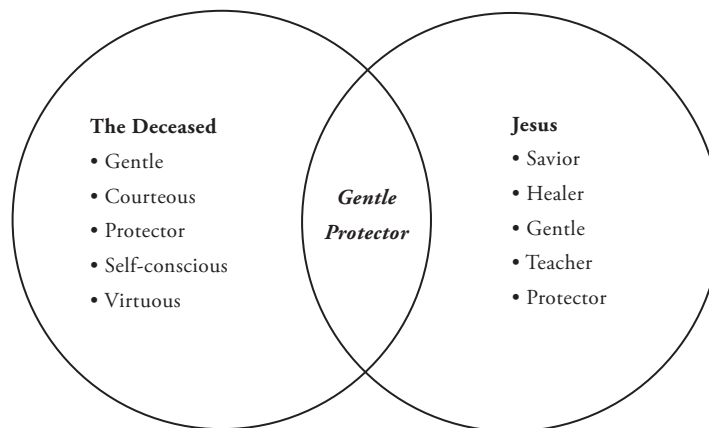
Naming the reason for grief is not altogether difficult to do. Although it can be challenging to do well. If you have been a participant in a funeral service for someone you love in recent memory, you may have experienced how difficult it can be to listen. I believe there are at least some ways pastors can help people to listen when preaching a funeral sermon.

The primary way that I try to gain a hearing initially is by talking about the deceased. Some may consider what I do a “eulogy.” But I have a different purpose in mind than most laypeople do when they speak eulogies. When I speak about the deceased it is Law. I speak about the deceased first because, like it or not, that is why most people show up at a funeral.⁴ This is the part of the funeral sermon the family helps me write. During the funeral planning process, I ask them to tell me about the person who died. They tell me why they loved him. They describe his quirks. They

share her little-known hobbies. Sometimes they share stories: love stories, humorous stories, or family vacation stories. I may share something myself or occasionally ask a question. But mostly I feverishly write down everything they say. At the end I ask everyone present to summarize their loved one in one or two words if they are able. I put all of this together as best I can in words that could easily be preached under five minutes. And when I am done speaking generally kind words about the deceased, I make clear why we are gathered: death.

There are several ways to name the reality of death. Generally, I attempt to point out the reason for grieving. I may comment, “all of those wonderful things we just heard about this dear saint are about to be buried in the ground.” I may say that “memories like the ones I just shared are moving but they are nothing like holding onto the real thing. We do not get to hug him anymore and that is why this hurts so very much.” I may mention “all of those things I just spoke of will now have to be spoken of in the past tense because he is now lying in a casket.” I am seeking to capture a similar sentiment as that of C. S. Lewis after the death of his beloved wife when he writes, “Will nothing persuade us that they are gone? What’s left? A corpse, a memory, and (in some versions) a ghost. All mockeries or horrors. Three more ways of spelling *dead*.”⁵ In other words, I simply aim to speak clearly and truthfully about how terrible death actually is. It can sound harsh and brutal but only because death is harsh and brutal. I am only calling it what it is. It may well crush people—that is the idea. It is also at this juncture that I take the opportunity to make clear why a death has occurred: sin.

As I have been speaking about the deceased during the first part of the sermon, I have also been weaving a phrase into each paragraph of the sermon. Picking the right phrase is probably the most challenging aspect of this endeavor. It needs to fit the person who died, and it also needs to fit God. This is the typological aspect of the sermon.⁶ Figure 2 gives the example of “Gentle Protector.”⁷ Like considering typology in Scripture, not everything about the deceased may be used of the anti-type. Here, the good and faithful aspects of the person’s life should be emphasized. For example, we recognize that Moses is a type of Christ, but not everything about Moses points to Christ. Moses delivered God’s people from slavery, but he also disobeyed God by striking the rock. When speaking of Moses as a type of Christ, we rightly emphasize the former, not the latter. The same applies when preaching a typological funeral sermon. When a typological phrase has been decided on, I begin to search for a text that fits it well. In the case of “Gentle Protector” several texts could be used: Psalm 23, Matthew 11:27–30, or selected verses from John 10.

Figure 2. *Typological Funeral Phrases*

The text I choose is my entry point to speaking the Gospel. Since the “gentle protector” has been taken away from people because of death, I attempt to fill that void with “The Gentle Protector.” One way to transition might be to say, “Even though this gentle protector will soon be lying in a grave, there is another who walked out from the grave: *The Gentle Protector*, Jesus Christ.” At this juncture, the pastor may speak whatever Gospel language he feels would be most appropriate perhaps based upon the chosen text. There will likely have to be a now and not yet character to the Gospel as mourners need comfort in the present, but the resurrection remains yet future. I generally proclaim the hope of the resurrection in the closing paragraph of the sermon. Finally, I conclude with the same words in every sermon. My congregation knows them well after several years and dozens of funerals: “Christ is risen. [Name of deceased] will rise. Christ will come again.”⁸

Concluding Thoughts

I have sought to present a rationale for and explanation of a typological funeral sermon. In addition, I have attempted to briefly sketch some of the current challenges in Christian funeral planning and provide some guidance to navigate the challenges pastorally and faithfully. I have endeavored to show how a typological funeral sermon may be a faithful and appropriate way to navigate the unique challenges pastors face in funeral ministry. Typological funeral sermons may not always be the most appropriate for all circumstances. For example, tragic deaths may call for something entirely different. I invite the seminary community to engage in discussion about the challenges we currently face in planning funerals and preaching

funeral sermons. I hope such discussions will aid to sharpen one another toward being faithful pastors and also lead to helping people grieve so they might be comforted with the hope of the resurrection. In closing, I have provided an example of a typological funeral sermon I preached recently which should help to clarify the above explanation.

A Typological Funeral Sermon Example

"A Remarkable Man" - John 11:17-44

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is a funeral I have not been looking forward to. And certainly, I am not the only one who feels that way. Rog touched a lot of people.

A Law: Speaking of the Deceased with Typological Phrase

Roger was remarkably witty and had a remarkable sense of humor. From "my dad had to pay my sisters to be good but not me—I was good for nothing" to "I feel a lot more like I do now than I did when I got here." It was a rare conversation if he did not make me laugh at least once. Truly, I have not met anyone with a wit to match his.

Roger was remarkably frugal. How many couples regift old birthday and anniversary cards for 20 years? How many times can you use and reuse a napkin, plastic cup, or paper plate? Well, more than once anyway! Of course, to go along with being frugal, Roger was also remarkably generous.

Roger was a remarkable dad. In fact, he just told me two weeks ago that he and Judy raised three really great kids. (They had four kids!) He really said that! We thought best to leave that one a mystery. In all honesty, Roger was a remarkable father because he loved you, he spent time with you, he expected a lot from you, he forgave you, he encouraged you, he disciplined you. He taught you what a family is supposed to look like. It occurred to me the other day as we were visiting that while there were some things that were consistent about your dad's character and treatment of each of you, you also each remembered and valued slightly different things. And that is because your dad loved each of you as you needed to be loved. But most importantly, he taught you about Jesus Christ. And he wanted nothing more of you than what the Lord does as he says in Micah: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God.

Roger had a remarkable career. How many times did you move? 16! How many lives did Roger touch and perhaps even save through his work? Judy showed me a letter written by a colleague who credited Roger with saving his life. At Roger's retirement party much could have been said about his accomplishments within the

company, but one person summarized Roger's work by simply commenting that it was obvious that Roger loved the Lord. What was that verse we just heard from Jesus about letting your light shine before others?

Roger was a remarkable husband. He talked about Judy with such affection and romance. Well, maybe affection and romance weren't exactly his thing. But honor, commitment, provision, faithfulness? Now we're talking. Best friends from the ages of 13 and 15. 58 years of marriage. And only one big argument...over the white dishes.

Roger was a remarkable friend. Ask his friends, ask any of us. Remarkable indeed.

B *Naming Reason for Grief: Death because of Sin*

Roger was a remarkable man. And we could say so much more. But for all the ways Roger was remarkable, he was at least in one way woefully unremarkable: he died. Just like everybody else, Roger was a sinful human being. Just like everybody else who died before him, sin finally got the better of him. As St. Paul says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and "the sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56) and "death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

C *Transition to Anti-type*

You see we're not here today because *Roger* was remarkable. But there was another man who died *and* rose from the dead. Now, that's remarkable. That Remarkable Man is the reason we're here today.

A' *Gospel: Speaking of Christ with Typological Phrase and Scriptural Text*

It was this Remarkable Man, Jesus Christ, that claimed Roger as his own dear child in Holy Baptism. It was this Remarkable Man, Jesus, who blessed Roger with a vibrant faith, a wonderful family, and abundant life. It was this Remarkable Man, Jesus, who forgave Roger of all his sins. And it is this Remarkable Man, Jesus, who holds Roger and all of us even now in his firm grip of grace.

How many times did Roger get to hear of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave? He had been dead for four days. Jesus intentionally shows up late in order that he might do a most remarkable thing. Mary and Martha are beside themselves. Jesus begins to weep and keeps on weeping. He grieves at the death of his friend who has died. The most Remarkable Man in history grieves when death shows up. That is not all that remarkable, I guess. All of us grieve, I suppose. But Jesus does something that none of us can. He calls out to the dead man, "Lazarus, come out!" And remarkably, Lazarus walks out of the tomb.

How many other remarkable things did Jesus do? He healed a man who was born blind, walked on water, calmed storms, fed thousands, and cast out demons. He

silenced the religious elites, flipped over tables in the temple, called fishermen as his disciples, forgave sins, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. And there are many more things we could add. But it is because of these things we confess that Jesus *is* a Remarkable Man, present tense. As such he is able to keep his promises to be with us and to comfort us in our grief.

B' Naming Reason for Hope: Resurrection because of Christ

Some of you also may not know that Roger could not stand the book of Revelation. We did it in Bible study a few years back and it was painfully difficult for him and for me. I joked with him quite some time ago that I might use Revelation for his funeral, so here it is. In Revelation 7, John sees a vision of a great multitude of people standing before the throne of God. They are wearing white robes and have palm branches in their hands and they are praising God. And then someone asks John, “who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” There is an answer to that question and it’s an important one, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Roger is among them now. He is praising his Lord and waiting along with us for Christ to do the most remarkable thing of all—to come again in glory and to call out to Roger and all the departed saints to come out from their graves.

Christ is risen. Roger will rise. Christ will come again.

May God’s peace which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Amen.

Endnotes

- 1 Long, Thomas G., 2013, *Accompany Them with Singing—The Christian Funeral* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press): 6.
- 2 Donald L. Deffner has written an article which includes some discussion on this matter entitled, “Proclaiming Life in Death: The Christian Funeral,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (January 1994): 5–24.
- 3 Examples of the state of grief might include any of the following or any combination thereof: fear, loneliness, anger, inadequacy, disappointment, guilt, and regret.
- 4 See Dreier, Gary, “The Funeral Sermon: Remembering the Deceased,” *Word & World* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 82.
- 5 Lewis, C.S., 1961, *A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins): 20. Emphasis is original.
- 6 On typology in general see Michael P. Middendorf’s brief excursus, “Beyond Typology” in Middendorf, Michael P., 2016, *Romans 9–16* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House): 1240–1245.
- 7 Some other typological phrases I have used include the following: Tender-hearted Craftsman, Devoted Servant, Joyful Friend, Contented Cross-bearer, Lovingly Mysterious, Sacrificial Giver.
- 8 My brother, Rev. Andrew Jones, initially came up with this idea.

How Embodied Human Creatures Converse... Online

David Edwards

Have you ever noticed just how much you can learn about what a person has going on in life without asking them a single question? All you have to do is hop on Facebook, scroll through twitter, or scan Instagram and you can see updates on everything! From the birth of a first child to the death of a loved one, from their favorite new show to Fantasy Football failures, it is pretty easy to learn a lot about a person and their life today with only so much as a couple of clicks on a screen or a keyboard.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to be mean online? Not mean like calling someone a name or making fun of their outfit, but mean like calling into question their very humanity. Whether it is a music video on YouTube or political post on Facebook or just a clever tweet, each post or upload is never more than a few comments away from heated and unrelated arguments about sexuality, God, or the government. And on the flip-side, does it ever seem a little odd to read about a person's profound adoration for someone they have never met and probably never will? You might not have known it at the time, but what you were seeing was a disembodied anthropology which, in our circles, sets a person down the path toward a disembodied theology.

Now what exactly is a "disembodied theology"?¹ A disembodied theology reduces God's human creatures down to mere vessels, simply sending and receiving information. Like an email sent from one computer to another, nothing more is needed than a clear WiFi connection. This disembodied view of humanity causes us to lose sight of the fully embodied design God has for his human creatures.

A disembodied theology downplays the intangibles of communication. If we do not push back against this disembodied view of humanity and consequential disembodied theology, we are at risk of losing sight of the needs and gifts we need and receive as embodied human creatures. If we, as people, are no more than mere recipients and dispensers of basic information, then the necessity of the incarnation itself is called into question! Who cares that Jesus become a fully embodied human being...if all we needed were a few words from God in Heaven.

We, as embodied human creatures of God, are more than simple vessels sending and receiving information. Our existence as embodied human creatures influences all aspects of our lives, including the ways in which we communicate. Being physically present with a person in order to foster relationships matters. Being able to empathize with people, in response to our actions or experiences they have had on their own, matters. And while there are ways in which online communication can support those realities, it cannot replace them. Social media simply cannot sustain the fullness of our embodied reality as God's human creatures.

So, what do we do? In the following essay I am inviting you all, my brothers and sisters in Christ, current and future leaders in Christ's church, into a conversation. This conversation will take place in the dining hall, the dorm rooms, during after chapel coffee, and anywhere else two or three are gathered. To get the conversation rolling I came up with five "rules" (using the term loosely). I wanted to start painting a picture of what I think it could look like for embodied human creators to operate in the world of social media. What I hope is that we, as embodied human creatures of God, can work together to come up with ways to use social media in *support* of our embodied reality, rather than hindering it.

Rule #1: Recognize the Limitations.

As embodied human creatures, it is important to recognize the limitations of online communication. This is easily the broadest and most all-inclusive rule. If we break this rule, we are undoubtedly breaking one of the other rules, and if we break one of the other rules, it is guaranteed that we are breaking this first rule. If this rule does not stand, then the rest of them are at risk of falling apart.

Communication is complex and multi-faceted. Take a minute, think about everything that goes into a having a conversation: facial expressions, gestures, volume, tone. How much does *knowing* someone factor into having any sort successful communication? And all of that can be involved in a simple conversation. What happens when on a conversation online becomes a debate?

Debating with someone on Facebook, for example, is like arguing with someone on the other side of a crowded room. Everyone can hear the exchange, but only the loudest people get involved and there is not much hope of changing anyone's mind. Whether it is a debate over the implications of a vague Facebook post or how the Law of God functions in the life of a Christian, it is not long before the limitations of online exchanges become apparent.

It is not enough to acknowledge the limitations of communication though, we have to actually *do* something with that knowledge, thus the conversation continues.

Rule #2: Say It to Their Face.

We have probably all heard some version of the old adage, “Do not say it, unless you would say it to their face.” This is sound advice, but it is usually dealing with the *content* of a conversation. For the purposes of rule number two, I am not so concerned about the potential hurtfulness of a comment. Instead, Rule #2 is about the next logical step after Rule #1. As fully-embodied human creatures, if we are content with the conversation starting and stopping online, something has gone wrong.

If, for example, you are having a conversation of some substance in the comment section, for example, it should be assumed that this conversation will carry on in a one-on-one context and, ideally, in person. One-on-one conversation, especially in person, is where there is more promise for the conversation to move from an alternating exchange of ideas to the development of new understandings, growth, and progress.

One of the greatest gifts of Christian community is mutual conversation and consolation. It is in the context of conversation and consolation that we can hold each other accountable, pray with one another, confess our sins and receive absolution. The sharing and experiencing of these gifts is hugely limited if the conversation never leaves the keyboard.

Rule #3: Distinguish Connections from Community.²

As embodied human creatures, we want to be able to distinguish the differences between connection and community. Facebook allows us to connect with *billions* of people; and, by and large, connection is a great thing. Communication with people across social media platforms opens doors for new opportunities and new relationships, and helps maintain the ones we have had for years. But connection itself is not same as community. The embodied creature needs more than just online communication without an embodied community.

We can see how a site like Facebook has tried to respond to that need. While we, fully embodied human creatures, can see the limitations (from Rule #1) of social media, Facebook has tried to overcome them with certain enhancements. Over the years, they have added features like the “Like” button in 2009 and “Reactions”

in 2016. Yet a “sad face” in response to a painful prayer request or a “laughing face” in response to a funny life-event falls short of creating the depth of a real community. Connections can serve to help *foster* community which goes beyond the internet, but they cannot stand in place of it.

Rule #4: Take in the "Bad" Stuff.

I was on Facebook one day and I came across an article covering a recent school shooting. On that particular day, I found the nature of the article to be especially troubling. So, instead of reading the article, I continued scrolling through my feed until I came across a video that made me literally laugh out loud. Immediately after the laughter though, I was struck again by sadness.

It occurred to me, at that moment, that there was something wrong with that experience. Instead of ignoring the difficult things that come across our news feeds, I recommend we take them seriously. Part of being an embodied human creature is engaging in the whole range of experiences we have.

When something like what I experienced happens to you, I have a couple suggestions: If it is a news item, pray about it. If it is a personal post, pray again and consider following-up directly with the poster. After all that, I think getting offline can be a good idea. Getting offline, for a time, can allow the “bad” stuff to sit with us for a moment and help us remember the real, fully embodied human creatures who are experiencing what was posted about.

Rule #5: Keep Using It.

Like Rule #1, if we miss Rule #5, the rest of the conversation does not really hold together. An embodied human creature *can still* use online communication. Yes, it is important to set healthy limits, and yes, it is probably better for some of us to make a clean break altogether. In fact, there are all sorts of good and rational reasons to close down your accounts and move on, but that is exactly why I end with Rule #5. In the face of a potentially strong desire to depart, I am asking you to stay.

One of my underlying assumptions in producing this essay is that we agree that the Christian life is one lived, primarily, in service to others. Yes, we can take that too far, but being at peace with our Creator, we are here to serve our fellow creatures. With so many of our fellow creatures interacting online, experiencing the consequences of a disembodied anthropology, we have a responsibility to stay engaged and bring something better. We have the opportunity to bring the gifts of an

embodied theology, a thorough and substantial Christian community to a world where it is desperately lacking. So, please share your suggestions, your critiques, and your ideas for taking action, and let us share with the world how we can live as embodied human creatures together.

Endnotes

- 1 It was Dr. Joel Oesch from Concordia Irvine who helped me recognize the connection between online social networks and embodied theology. For his insightful and thorough treatment of the topic, see his 2017 book, *More Than a Pretty Face* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications).
- 2 Credit for this observation also goes to Dr. Oesch.