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“A Gospel-Based Budgeting of Theology’s Resources”

Dale Meyer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MeyerD@csl.edu

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“A Gospel-Based Budgeting of Theology’s Resources”

I recently cracked open Richard Lischer’s *A Theology of Preaching*. I literally cracked it open; the glue in the spine was so dry that it pulverized upon opening and I was left with a sheaf of papers. No matter, Lischer’s work offers insights that are as fresh today as when they were first published in 1981. One phrase especially caught my attention, a phrase that reminds us pastors that we should be discriminating in our studies and ministry. With abundant theological resources at our disposal, with the temptation to get engrossed in theological tangents to gospel ministry, and with only so much time in a day, our vocation of caring for souls calls us to put a premium on the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Lischer calls it, “a Gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources.”¹

Just like a financial budget for home, church and seminary, “Gospel-based budgeting” is a learned skill. That’s true because the law is born in every heart; the gospel comes from outside. Baptism hasn’t removed the inborn law from the preacher’s heart, and unless we are intentional about studying how the gospel speaks to the countless situations where law and sin are working death, we leave a void that will necessarily be filled by the law, that being our natural default. Our diploma and ordination isn’t sufficient, which is why C. F. W. Walther encouraged his students to be wary. “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”² To keep us mindful of gospel-dominance, “Gospel-based budgeting,” Robert Kolb offers a helpful fact about the Reformers.

The Wittenbergers seem to have conceived of God’s Word as a body of teaching which was of one peace, a whole. They seldom if ever used the word “doctrine” in the plural. God’s Word does not consist of a string of pearls, doctrines, which go together to make up a necklace. Instead, God’s Word is like a body. It has different members, which most sixteenth-century Lutherans did not call “doctrines”—in the plural—as we do, but instead “articles of faith” when they occur in Confessional documents and “topics” or “loci [commonplaces]” when they occur in dogmatic treatises. These specific topics or articles are called into existence as projections of Biblical teaching by the challenges of the world, whether inside or outside the church, in specific situations.³

One reason why The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod maintains its seminaries is so our congregations and church workers can have needed and timely theological resources to help you apply the various articles of the evangelical doctrine to the specific challenges facing your congregation and community. Few of us pastors and churchworkers have the time and resources to become expert in the many theological topics that confront us in twenty-first-century ministry. In fact, no person, individual seminary professors included, can be knowledgeable in all the branches of academic classical theology and how they are useful in applying law and gospel to today’s ministry challenges. And because we are in a post-churched society, laypeople increasingly find themselves

in witnessing situations and many desire more understanding about the faith. So the church maintains theological faculties, its body of full-time theologians, each skilled in a specific theological discipline and all together constituting a substantial resource for you who are on the frontlines of ministry. Ask most of our professors about their division of time between classroom and their presentations in and for the church-at-large and you'll find that they gladly give considerable time to providing theological resources to congregations, pastors and laypeople. This is not new. The *Concordia Journal* is well known, our wide array of advanced degrees is available residentially and by a combination of online and residential intensives, our professors speak in your districts and congregations, the same professors serve on committees for the LCMS, and our extensive offerings on iTunesU are accessed around the world and becoming increasingly known within the LCMS. What is new is Concordia Seminary's desire to offer you much more. Because there is so, so much more to learn after graduation when we find ourselves in the challenges of congregation and community, we have new and varied resources to support all the baptized in giving "a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15).

Ministry 411 is one new offering. Ministry 411 = 4 book clubs each year + 1 symposium + 1 workshop or conference of your choice. Four Concordia Seminary Online Book Club offerings:

"The Club" enables busy pastors to dig deeply into readings that will help them in congregational ministry. Four book clubs will be offered each year. Each track will cover a book each quarter. The book clubs will explore topics covered in our on-campus symposia, issues of pastoral practice and leadership, hermeneutics and homiletics, and classic Christian readings.

Add one symposium and one workshop or conference and Ministry 411 offers a simple and smooth way to use continuing education programs for you and other pastors in the field. Pastors in the field will receive one Continuing Education Unit (CEU) when they participate in an offering.

Another new offering is Lunch & Learn Courses. These live, online courses meet for a one-hour session one day a week over the lunch hour for a quarter (ten weeks). Pastors watch a presentation by a professor and then engage in a discussion of it with fellow pastors. As with the book club, one CEU will be given upon successful completion.

Continuing education is important not only for pastors, but for lay people as well. Concordia Seminary is offering new and revised opportunities that are designed specifically for laity but are also helpful to clergy. These new offerings include the creation of the Lay Bible Institute Online and a substantial revision of the "In the Word" Bible study series. For the past twenty years, the Lay Bible Institute has been conducted on Concordia Seminary's campus. It provides an opportunity for laypeople and pastors to deepen their theological understanding by engaging in a wide range of theological topics and contemporary issues. Topics have been the Crusades, Muslim outreach, American politics in light of the Lutheran distinction of the two kingdoms, and bioethics, to name but a few. Both pastors and laity have attended and learned for their ministries. Now Concordia Seminary offers the Lay Bible Institute Online. For two hours one

Wednesday each month, Concordia Seminary professors will share insights from God's word and from Christian thinkers that have shaped their lives and the way they see the world around them. The goal of these online webinars is to provide participants a fresh perspective for thinking about issues affecting church and culture in the world today.

Concordia Seminary is currently revising our "In the Word" Bible Studies for congregational use. You might call these, "Bible Studies in a Box." Each Bible study provides a four-week study of a topic or section of the Bible. It includes brief round-table discussion videos of seminary professors that can provide a discussion starter for congregational Bible studies and/or individual studies of God's word. Class outlines and discussion questions come with the Bible study. A new study entitled, "The Mysterious God: A Study of Job 38–41" is being prepared and will be followed by a study of Philippians.

Our *Concordia Seminary Magazine*, long a source of information about what's going on at the Seminary, has been redesigned to bring you articles written by our professors about theological topics that are of interest to laity and pastors alike and helpful for our confession to today's world. To get more information about any of these many offerings, email ce@csl.edu.

So what my predecessor, John F. Johnson, said years ago is coming true. He spoke about a "seminary without walls." That's also true about the Concordia Seminary Library, some 270,000 holdings that are available today beyond the walls of Fuerbringer Hall. Whatever your need or however deeply you want to research, our library sees itself as a central headquarters for the theological needs of the entire Synod. Any rostered church worker within the Synod can check out books from our library. The process is easy; just send an email request to librarycirc@csl.edu with a request of the books you would like. Your request will be shipped within forty-eight hours. We ask that you assume the cost for mailing the books back to the Seminary. Pastors in the St. Louis area receive a four-week check out with two renewals. Pastors living at a distance have a six-week check out with two renewals. If you are an alumnus of Concordia, St. Louis you can also access to our ATLA online services again by sending an email with your date of graduation to hoeltkeb@csl.edu or librarycirc@csl.edu. You will then be set up with online guest access. Finally, anyone at all, pastor, lay person, or your group can ask our research desk for any help with research of any kind. Call the Reference Desk at 314-505-7032 or send an email to libraryref@csl.edu.

The faculty of Concordia Seminary has goals as we offer these Continuing Education resources to the church. First, we want to focus on the needs of the church and the daily lives of her people. Second, we want to make access easy for you. The Internet provides an easy access global classroom that builds on the growing use of technology as an educational platform. Third, our offerings are intentionally collaborative. Continuing education is done best within a collaborative group of contextual learners who can share experiences and assist one another in reflection and application. I have a pre-Internet story about that coming up. Finally, since not all information available for continuing education is theologically reliable and accurate, we strive to offer

biblical and confessional quality. The Smalcald Articles, wrote Robert Kolb, “reveal the center and compass for all confession: redemption in Jesus Christ. They reveal the basic concern of all confession: effective application of God’s Word to the life of the church—good pastoral care of Christ’s people.”⁴ That is still the commanding need today, gospel ministry through “gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources.”

I reminisce with deep gratitude about my first circuit. Here I was, newly minted from the Seminary with my Greek and Hebrew sharp and all my other classroom learnings fresh. Fresh? In hindsight “green” is a much better word. It was when our Winkel conference dealt with casuistry that I got my first inkling of how helpful continuing education can be for ministry. If your pastoral conference does casuistry, and I hope they do, you know how it goes. One brother presents a head-scratching case and sincerely seeks insight on how to proceed. The other brothers ask questions to wrap their minds around the issue, and insights are offered. “I had a case like that 20 years ago . . .” “Does Fritz have any insight?” “How about the CTCR?” “I’m thinking of when Jesus . . .” “And what about the Small Catechism which says . . .” And so it went. The many decades of learning and pastoral experience gathered around the table were integrated into a singular focus upon evangelical pastoral care. Oh, those other pastors knew so much more than I did; today the whole of us know more than any of us knows individually. Continuing education is about our Life Together for the care of souls with the one and only doctrine, the doctrine of the gospel, which we are called to speak and apply through its various articles in the specific situations of our ministries. As insightful as it is, Richard Lischer’s phrase, “A Gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources” does not flow easily off the lips. “Lead with the gospel” does, and that is our focus as we offer you our faculty’s time, learning, and energies for your ministry.

Dale A. Meyer
President

Endnotes

¹ Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 22.

² C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, Thesis XXV, 403.

³ Robert Kolb, “Luther’s Smalcald Articles: Agenda for Testimony and Confession,” *Concordia Journal*, (April, 1988): 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.