

# THE HOLY SPIRIT IN WERNER ELERT'S THEOLOGY

Edward Schroeder

[For information on Elert's life and thought I recommend the Wikipedia article: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner\\_Elert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_Elert)

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## A Loooong Introduction

Asking an 85-year-old professor to give a lecture—on any topic—is dangerous. Bob Bertram's quote: When you're in your dotage, you often slip into anecdotage. Here's some anecdotal stuff.

I was Elert's student at the University of Erlangen in Germany during the academic year 1952-53. Two other Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) students were there too: Bob Schultz and Dick Baepler. We three went to Erlangen because our Concordia prof, Jaroslav Pelikan, recommended Elert as a "remedy" for the hang-up of our Missouri Synod on Biblical inerrancy. "Elert is today's major confessional Lutheran theologian doing law/gospel theology free from the albatross of verbal inspiration." So we went.

But why should we be paying any attention to a man named Werner Elert at a Crossings conference?

[Pronunciation: The German letter "e" is pronounced as "ay" is pronounced in English. Open mouth "ay." So Werner Elert is "Vayr-nayr Ay-layrt," Not "Wur-nur El-urt."]

I'll give a brash answer to that question: "If Elert had never existed, neither would the Crossings Community. We wouldn't be here in this room today." And it starts with those three

Concordia students in Erlangen 63 years ago.

The Crossings connection to Elert is evident on the Crossings website. The first-ever Crossings conference had an Elert-expert (Rudolf Keller nine years ago) come from Germany and give a lecture on Elert. You can read it on the website. Lots of other items show up there when you put E-L-E-R-T into the internal search slot. The biggest item is the 26-page document that we'll be looking at later, Elert's "Feste Sätze," theses-sentences he would slowly dictate to us at the end of each class session, in effect, "Here are all the notes you need for this lecture just completed."

[GO to  
<<https://crossings.org/archive/ed/promisingtradition/default.shtml>> on the Crossings website. The "Feste Sätze" are chapter 18 in the collected essays called THE PROMISING TRADITION.]

Same thing – "If it hadn't been for . . . " – could be said, more obviously, for Bob Bertram, who dreamed up the CROSSINGS name and the whole idea. It's also on the website: "Crossings Inc. A Proposal. Epiphany 1974."

Same could be said for O.P. Kretzmann, long-term president of Valparaiso University. If he hadn't been in Bavaria in the summer of 1953 and "crossed" paths with Bob Schultz, Dick Baepler and me at a retreat he was conducting with U.S. military chaplains and invited us "Missourians" to join him there—where the conclusion was (in his inimitable voice): "I WANT YOU BOYS AT VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY!" – The Crossings Community would never have come into existence.

For today, it's just Elert.

More anecdotage: The track from Valparaiso University to Crossings needs telling. Here's the history:

Baepler to Valparaiso University in 1954

Schultz to V.U.—doctorate under Elert completed—1956. Schroeder to V.U. 1957

Aided and abetted by Schultz's frequent presentations and publications in Missouri Synod venues, "law/gospel" [Erlangen version] became the mantra for "Valpo theology."

Robert Bertram, chair of the department, was also a law/gospeller. ['Twas possibly already in his DNA. His grandfather, William Dau, had translated and published the Law-Gospel lectures of Missouri Synod patriarch C.F.W. Walther into English. His father, Martin Bertram, had translated Elert's dogmatics, *The Christian Faith*, for the Missouri Synod's Concordia Publishing House. However, CPH eventually decided not to publish the translation since Elert was "in error" on verbal inspiration.]

There were additional kindred spirits among our Valpo departmental colleagues.

And possibly the major messengers publicizing "Valpo theology" throughout the Missouri Synod were our students who then went home and told their parents—and pastors(!)—what they were learning.

The course syllabi for core theology courses (required of all students!) were cranked out on law/ gospel mimeograph machines.

Ooops. Anectdotage is taking over! Herewith a fast-track to our being here today:

—Bertram goes to Concordia Seminary in 1963. Systematic theology department. Four of his department colleagues are "old Missourians," four are kindred spirits.

—Schroeder to Concordia Seminary in 1971.

–Law/gospel theology, esp. law/gospel Biblical hermeneutics, articulated as the “Aha!” of Reformation theology, attracts many students, deemed a winsome alternative to the lenses of verbal inspiration for reading the Bible.

–January 1974 the explosion at Concordia Seminary. Biblical hermeneutics the hot potato. 45 profs dismissed. The four “old Missourians” in systematics department and one exegete remain.

–Seminary-in-exile comes into existence, Seminex. Law-Gospel the trademark for “Seminex theology.”

–Explicit “Crossings” seminars –“Word of God and Daily Work”–offered by Bertram/Schroeder in Seminex’s later years. The Crossings Community incorporated.

–1983 Seminex closes shop in St. Louis. Crossings’ board of directors asks Schroeder to become executive secretary as full-time job and take Crossings on the road.

–1983 to 1993. Decade of semester-long accredited academic courses (via Webster University) and weekend workshops: “Word of God and Daily Work.” Bertram, now at the Lutheran seminary in Chicago, but resident in St. Louis, commutes home every weekend. Bob teaches one 3-credit course on Saturday, Ed does two during the week. A twenty-course curriculum evolves. Ed out of town many weekends doing “Word of God and Daily Work” workshops around the country, 200 in ten years. The two plot and scheme as Ed taxis Bob to the airport every Monday morning for his commute back to Chicago.

–1993. Bertram and Schroeder both retire. Next generation takes over. Internet the main venue. Law-Gospel theology the continuing golden thread.

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Back to the question: Would we be here in this room at this conference if Elert had never existed? If so, it would have to have been a very different story. Maybe you can imagine it. I cannot. But then at 85 comes dotage. Defined by Webster as " a period or state of senile decay marked by decline of mental poise and alertness."

FINALLY, back to Elert. And my assigned topic.

Picking up from the long anecdote above. 63 years ago at the University of Erlangen in Germany. I was 22 yrs. old, half-way through the five-year seminary program at Concordia Seminary here in St. Louis. Three of us from Concordia Seminary were there, Bob Schultz, already graduated, Dick Baepler, my classmate (same age) and me. All three of us registered for Elert's lectures on dogmatics, the UR -text of his dogmatics book: *Der christliche Glaube* [The Christian Faith]. All three of us were members of the seminar he offered that semester called "Kerygma und Dogma."

Let's start with that seminar, "Kerygma und Dogma." Those two nouns are important for what I'm asked to do here today. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is patently a segment of the dogma of the trinitarian nature of God.

And if that is important at all, it is important for what Christians proclaim, for the Christian kerygma. In the K&D seminar we focused explicitly on that topic for a whole semester. My "Seminarschein" –evidence that I was indeed there—and Elert's signature now appear on the first page of the *Feste Sätze*, now present on the Crossings website.

What are these "Feste Sätze?" They are the theses-sentences Elert would slowly dictate to us at the end of each class session. In effect "Here's what I've been teaching you this past hour." The "Feste Sätze" from class are the skeleton for Elert's

fully-fleshed-out dogmatics book, *The Christian Faith*.

Elert's maxim was: "Dogma ist das Sollgehalt des Kerygmas." Dogma is the "Sollgehalt" of the kerygma. It's not easy to put that word "Sollgehalt" into English. Here's my translation: "Dogma prescribes what should be in the Christian kerygma." What should be there in the kerygma (= message) to insure that it is the CHRISTIAN message.

Both dogma and kerygma are Greek words found in the NT. Basic definition: "Prescription and proclamation."

"Dogma" as "prescription" in NT texts:

- Luke 2. Caesar Augustus's "dogma": Get registered in your home town.
- Acts 16:4. Paul and Silas head out to tell the new Christians in Asia Minor the "dogmata" of the Apostolic Council of Acts 15.
- Eph. 2:15. Christ . . . having abolished the law of commandments and "dogmas."

Dogma does not mean teachings. We'll come back to that later.

For kerygma, think "message" which has now also become a verb, not just a noun, in English during my lifetime. But that makes it close to the word kerygma. For the "kery-" Greek root generates three prominent words in the NT. Kerygma = the noun for message. Keryx = the noun for messenger. And keryssein = the verb: "To message. To be a keryx messaging the kerygma."

The two joined words in "Sollgehalt" make up this key term. "Soll" is a "you ought to, you should, (almost) you are under orders to" item. Gehalt is "contents," what's in the package. So, you ought to have x,y,z in the package if the package is to be the Christian kerygma.

Notice that the "should" is not addressed to the hearer: It is

not: "You should believe this or that."

It is addressed to the proclaimer. It's a "you should, you ought to" –yes, even "you gotta"–to preachers. But it's not a "you gotta" of Law. It's a Grace-imperative. You've gotta be saying such and so if you're a messenger messaging the Gospel message.

For Elert there were basically only two dogmas, both coming from the first centuries of Christian church history: Trinity and Christology.

So there are two foci for my assignment today. Like an ellipse with two centers.

–The Holy Spirit in the trinitarian dogma.

–The Holy Spirit in the christological dogma.

–And then conclusion: How that makes God-talk and Jesus-talk to come out Good News.

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Here's how the whole dogmatics is organized: seven parts.

Prolegomena

1. Natural Religion. Man's Self-understanding Under the Hiddenness of God
2. The What and How of God's Revelation
3. Dogma of the Triune God
4. God and the World
5. The Christological Dogma. Reconciliation
6. The New Existence. Third Article of the Creed
7. The Future and Its Fulfillment. Eschatology.

Back to the Feste Sätze. Elert on the Trinity.

[Project the "Feste Saetze" on the screen– the Promising Tradition, p. 77 from the Crossings website.

<https://crossings.org/archive/ed/promisingtradition/default.shtm>

## #18. THE TRINITARIAN DOGMA AS A CONFESSION OF MONOTHEISM

- 1) Theology in the narrower sense as the doctrine about "God Himself" is possible only because God, while speaking to us, also speaks about himself.
- 2) We can speak about God only in the manner in which we ourselves are addressed by him in law and gospel.
- 3) The eternal Word of the Father is the Son of God. He is witnessed to us by the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Consequently theology in the narrower sense must speak about God himself in trinitarian terms.
- 4) The church's trinitarian dogma fulfills the monotheistic obligation incumbent upon her especially in her rejection of all mythological distortions, above all that of modalism.

## #19. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL AND PNEUMATOLOGICAL GROUNDS OF THE TRINITARIAN DOGMA

- 1) We can speak of God only in the manner in which he himself has spoken to us in the Son. Consequently christology is presupposition for the doctrine of God himself.
- 2) In contrast with the logos-christology of the ancient church, which sought to interpret the person of Christ in terms of the logos concept (E. Brunner today does likewise), we can comprehend the concept of logos only in terms of the person of Christ. We need the totality of Christ's life, teaching, death, and resurrection in order to comprehend what sort of word is meant by designating him "logos."
- 3) This Logos of God, like every other word of God, is creative word, for it creates new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). In this act of new creation, we are the object, while God and Christ constitute the inseparable subject.

4) The N. T. witness compels us to the confession of 2 Clement: One must think about Christ the way one thinks about God (1:1). Thereby the theological problem arises, not only that of the relationship between God and man in Christ, but also the relationship between God and God.

5) God's address to us in Christ comes only via the paraclesis of the Paraclete. Consequently pneumatology too is presupposition for the doctrine of God himself.

6) In the N.T. the word "pneuma" is sometimes used in such a fashion that one might understand it as a thing. This possibility is, however, excluded when God is designated "pneuma", and when the same is said of Christ.

7) As the promise is made about the sending of the Holy Spirit, and as that promise is fulfilled, we are nothing more than receivers. God and Christ are once more for us the inseparable subject.

8). Pneumatology too raises the question of the relationship between God and God, since the N.T. witness predicates relationships between God himself, his pneuma, and Christ that are without analogy anywhere else.

## #20. THE GROUNDS AND LIMITS OF THE TRINITARIAN CONFSSIONAL FORMULA

1) The trinitarian dogma cannot be understood or based on speculative foundations. Its intention rather is to do justice to the necessary circumstances of the doctrine of God himself, viz., that it can only be monotheistic, and yet also trinitarian. The reason for this is that God has not revealed himself to us in any other fashion.

[So far the Feste Sätze]

So there are christological and pneumatological prior elements, prolegomena, before you get to the trinity. In a sense, we must read Father, Son and Holy Spirit in reverse order—Holy Spirit, Son, Father—to get a picture of the trinity as God unfolds it to us. Which Luther himself does, interestingly, in his Large Catechism: “...we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.”

In Elert’s formulation it comes out like this: We can talk about God only with the data that has been given to us. That available data is what the Paraclete has brought to our attention in the apostolic witness. Central to that data is Christ. And central to Christ’s word and work is his reconciling us to God, now God our Father, as he has been Father of the only-begotten Son from eternity.

The second place in Elert’s systematic theology where the Holy Spirit shows up is—no surprise—when Elert moves to the third article of the Christian Creed. From the Feste Sätze, Section 40:

#### “Pneumatology and Church

—Assertions about the Holy Spirit are possible only within the context of the doctrine of the trinity, as we have done earlier. The person of the Holy Spirit differs from the person of the incarnate Son of God in that the former is perceptible only in his action.

—The church is the work of the Holy Spirit and the place of his action.

—The Holy Spirit creates the church not by speaking of himself, but of him who sent him (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13f.) Christ is not subordinate to the church. It is rather vice versa. The

church is Christ's institution. Its connection to Christ is founded on his commission to proclaim the gospel, on his instituting the procedures of baptism, eucharist, absolution, and on his promise."

Those texts from John's gospel just cited give Elert his major term for discussing the Holy Spirit. The word is Paraclete. Over and over again as this Third-Article section of his dogmatics unfolds he speaks of The Paraclete, and of the Paraclete's work, "Paraclesis." Paraclete is St. John's own favored term—both in the gospel and in the first epistle of St. John. Twice the term is even predicated to Jesus himself. All the other times it is "another," a second, Paraclete, also designated by John as the "Holy Spirit."

[The noun Paraclesis, the work done by the Paraclete, never appears in the work of St. John, but is manifold in the double-volume written by St. Luke—his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles— and also in the letters of St. Paul. The verb "Parakalein" can be found dozens of times from Matthew all the way up to—but not in—the book of Revelation. The last time it shows up is in the book of Jude.]

So what is Paraclesis? The work of the Paraclete. But what is that? Elert frequently cites Paul's use of the term in 2 Cor. 5 and 6.

5:18-6:1. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God IS MAKING HIS APPEAL through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might

become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we URGE YOU also not to accept the grace of God in vain.”

The capitalized words are parakalein in Greek. Both God and the apostle are the subjects in those two parakalein sentences, and the paraclesis is the same in both cases.

These christological and pneumatological “presuppositions” [Voraussetzungen” in German] could be labelled the two centers of the ellipse of the God-data available to us. In John’s gospel it comes as a surprise that Christ too, not only the Holy Spirit, is called Paraclete, already a signal of their collaboration. Jesus the first Paraclete, Holy Spirit the second. The entire operation trinitarian. In that passage from 2 Corinthians: Jesus as Paraclete one is expressed as: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” Holy Spirit as Paraclete two: “We urge (we parakalein) you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.”

Paraclesis reappears as major term in Elert’s description of what the Gospel itself is. Here are Elert’s Feste Sätze on that with a bit of my interpretive commentary.

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## #11 The Gospel

The word “Gospel” is used in two ways in the N.T. It is both a report (indicative sentences: “Here’s what’s happening”) and a message personally addressed to us (imperative sentences: “Hey you, listen. This is about you!”) The indicative sentences are most frequent in the four written gospels of the N.T., the “Hey you” imperatives in the apostolic epistles.

Concerning the indicative sentences, two items are present. First, indicative-mood gospel sentences report about Jesus in

such a way that the Word of God is perceptible in him. John 1 designates Christ as God's "logos," the Word of God. Paul in 2 Cor.5:13 says this Word is the Word of reconciliation, God being reconciled with sinners.

Second, the human speech of the apostles is also called God's Word of Gospel because the person of Christ (same as above) is the substance and content of that speaking. Insofar as later proclamation—all the way down to our day—has the same substance and content, it too can be labelled "The Word of God."

Concerning the imperative sentences: The Gospel also comes in imperative sentences when the report about Christ, the indicative, is applied to the hearers and readers: "Hey you . . ." With this in mind the written gospels report how Jesus himself called his hearers to come to him and listen (Matt. 11:28). When we move to the N.T. witness of the apostles, we see how they regularly add an appeal, a "hey you..." to their own presentation of the report about Jesus. Example: 2 Cor. 5:20. Paul uses "report" language about the "word of reconciliation," and then adds the appeal— the "Hey you"— to the hearers: "We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

The imperative element expresses the fact that the substance and content of the Gospel is meant for the hearers. It aims to to strike them, to lay claim to them. "This Gospel is talking about you."

All of the messaging coming from the apostles is the means—media, pipeline—for making the reported Christ-event audibly available. This is the Paraclete in action. The apostles witness to the reconciliation that has happened in Christ. Their testimony does not create it. It had already happened before they came onto the scene. So the hearers are not asked to "believe" the apostles. They are entreated to trust the Christ whom the apostles tell about—in their own indicative and

imperative sentences.

When Elert speaks about the words “Holy” and “Spirit,” he does the same thing he did when he taught us what the Greek term LOGOS meant when applied to the Son of God. [“Don’t put the ‘Son Of God’ into the Greek wineskin of LOGOS. Rather, make it a new wineskin by filling the term LOGOS with what the N.T. says about Christ. The terms and metaphors used for portraying Christ, the Christ-dogma, must be congruent with the ‘Christusbild’– the Christ- picture–presented in the N.T witness.”] His theology of the Holy Spirit follows the same procedure: filling those Greek terms with the substance of Spirit/Paraclete texts throughout the entire New Testament.

His cornerstone text is John 15:7-15. Straight from Jesus.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

8 And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;

10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more;

11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he

will take what is mine and declare it to you.

We might also call this text the cornerstone for Luther's term "Christum treiben." The Paraclete's work is "pushing Christ" into places where he's not yet present. In short, it's the ongoing work of the triune God in world history ever since Jesus' "Going to the Father – the trinitarian road from Calvary to Easter to Ascension to Pentecost."

[Elert does go into the details of the early church's trinitarian debates and the technical terms in both Greek and Latin that were used then, many appearing in the text of the Nicene Creed used in our liturgies, but I won't rehearse that here. GO to the Feste Sätze on the Crossings website for those data, if you want to see them.]

Summa: in the dogma of the trinity, the third person of the trinity is the Paraclete who, as Jesus says in John's gospel, "takes what is mine and declares it to you." Any and all processes, any media and persons doing that are the Paraclete at work doing paraclesis, doing "Christum treiben." In the language of Augsburg Confession V, they are doing "ministry."

Augsburg Confession Article 5:

"In order that we may obtain this faith [just described in Article 4], the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake."

Note that "ministry" here is not a synonym for clergy. Ministry is the label for the transfer process of "taking what is mine and declaring it to you." In other vocabulary from Augsburg,

ministry is getting the merits and benefits of Christ to the troubled sinners who need them. Punning on the academic degree nowadays called D.Min, the Holy Spirit is the Doctor of Ministry in Holy Trinity.

The Paraclete is the foreman of all the actions listed in Augsburg's article 5, actions that would never be self-generated, but are nudged, promoted, animated by the third person of the trinity.

There's no better summary that I know of than what many of us may still remember from catechism class, Luther's Small Catechism on the third article of the creed; let's see how many of us can still recite it.

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I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?—Answer.

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

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Notice how broadly Luther expands the paraclesis of the Paraclete. He presents the Holy Spirit as the salvation foreman for everything on up to and including a blessed outcome on Judgment Day.

That's our segue to the remaining material on Holy Spirit in Elert's treatment of the third article of the creed. You can follow it in the Feste Sätze on the Crossings website.

After sections on church and sacraments, he moves to closure discussing "The New Existence," and actually takes those terms from Luther's explanation above, terms which Luther took right out of the New Testament—calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, keeps—and links them to the Paraclete's paraclesis.

Here's his list in the Feste Sätze:

Predestination

Election

Calling

Illumination

Justification

In his dogmatics book these five grow to ten N.T. terms for the work of the Paraclete.

Predestination

Election

Calling

Illumination

Justification

Repentance, conversion, regeneration.

Perseverance

Freedom.

Here's a segment from the Feste Sätze illustrating the centrality of the Paraclete as the Creator Spiritus of the new existence. Check the Crossings website for the rest.

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#51 PREDESTINATION, ELECTION, CALLING

1) If one conceives of predestination in terms of God being the cause of all, then that is atheism, since God is no causal

“thing.” If one conceives of God as the origin (Urheber) of all that is, then this notion of predestination amounts to a doublet of the doctrine of creation.

2) If one understands predestination as God’s eternal decree about the eternal salvation or destruction of man, we can then discuss it only in faith or unfaith. A discussion in faith can occur only on the ground of the Word of God spoken to us in Christ.

3) The word about Christ, and the paraclesis too (“be reconciled”), is meant unconditionally and universally. Only because it is meant for all and unconditional, is it also meant for me. The thought that it is not meant for all and that God is not in earnest with this word for some people (and perhaps also not for me), or the thought that He wills the opposite of that which he offers them (or me) in Christ, is plausible on reasonable grounds. But at the same time it destroys the ground and substance of faith.

4) Hardening of hearts is punishment and as such it is God’s present action. Nowhere in the N.T. is it traced back to an eternal decree of God’s. It is also by no means necessarily ultimate and final rejection.

5) To believe in the paraclesis is to believe that God has the freedom in this moment, contrary to the order of death which he himself has inflicted, to be gracious to me.

6) The message that comes to us in the paraclesis is designated in the N.T. as calling (kalein, kleesis) when it is focused on the goal: Into fellowship with Christ (I Cor 1:9), to freedom (Gal 5:13), to peace (Col 3:15), into his own kingdom and glory (I Thess 2:12, I Pe 5:10), to eternal life (I Tim 6:12), into God’s marvelous light (I Pe 2:9).

7) It is called election (eklogē, eklegesthai) when the

personal relationship between caller and called is to be expressed: Christ in relation to “his own” (Jn 13:1); The Father has given them to him (Jn 10:20; 17:6; 18:9); they are his friends (Jn 15:15); he loves them (Jn 13:1); and they love him (a4:15); he knows them and they know him (10:14). From both sides it is a loving knowledge (nosse cum affectu).

8) The concept of salvation entails also the element of being special. The believers are called chosen, since they are factually in a preferred situation before all others. This preferred status they have received as a gracious act of God. Of Christ himself it is said that he is “chosen,” but not in the sense that he is selected out of a group of other sons. Knowing that you have been so selected (chosen out of the world, Jn 15:19, Gal 1:4) follows from God’s preferential act.

9) The concept of fore-knowledge (prognosis) (Rom 8:29: 11:2) affirms that the mutual loving foreknowledge is initiated from God’s side. The substance of God’s pro-thesis (Eph 1:9; Rm 8:28; 2 Tim 1:9) “purpose,” is the salvation of men. Pre-destining (proorizein) is God actualizing his purpose.

10) Certainty that one is elected, namely, already beloved by God, having escaped the destroyer, preferred and the recipient of grace—this is the capstone of Christian certainty (Heilsgewissheit).

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## Conclusion:

What then is the DOGMA of the Holy Spirit—dogma as prescription for the kerygma—in what we have just heard from Elert?

What is the prescription for what must be said when you are speaking of the Holy Spirit in such a way that what you say is the Good News of the Christian Message?

I have some ideas. But I've talked long enough. So, for the next ten minutes, y'all—all y'all—do some talking. Discuss this at your table. And come up with at least ONE answer to that question to tell all of us when the 10 minutes are up.

[THE HOLY SPIRIT IN WERNER ELERT'S THEOLOGY \(PDF\)](#)

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# The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism

Steven C. Kuhl

## I. Introduction

1. The title of my talk, “The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism,” is meant to say that the topic of the Holy Spirit is a big topic today for many Christians and academic theologians chiefly because of the global strength of the Pentecostal Movement. It is not to say that Pentecostalism has the last word on the topic of the Holy Spirit – indeed, Pentecostals differ greatly, even on this topic – but that the Pentecostal experience has marked the point of departure for the discussion of the topic today.

2. We can think of the term “Pentecostal” much like we think about the term “Protestant.” Protestants are often lumped together as a group, not because they are all in agreement on doctrine and practice, but because they shared a common aversion

to aspects of the religious status quo when they emerged, namely, Roman Catholicism. In light of that common “opponent,” they did come to share some general common accents. For example, Protestants tended to affirm notions like the priority of Scripture over tradition, justification by grace apart from works, and the priesthood of all believers. In addition, they also tended to reject ideas like the Sacrifice of Mass, the cult of the saints, the requirement of priestly celibacy, and the sacerdotal view of the Sacraments. But when you scratch beneath the surface of what different Protestant groups mean by these common affirmations and rejections you will soon notice substantial differences in interpretation and practice.

3. Pentecostalism is like this, too. Pentecostals tend to share a common critique of today’s mainline denominational churches. They see them as focused on institutional survival, doctrinal pettiness and lacking in life and vitality—all because they lack an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, what Pentecostals call “the baptism in the Holy Spirit” or “Spirit Baptism.” Pentecostals would say that mainline churches are open to the idea of being Christian but not to the experience of being Christian. To be sure, Pentecostals disagree on many things concerning the interpretation of their experience of the Holy Spirit and the biblical narrative that they claim confirms their experience. In their 100 year history, three very different classifications of Pentecostalism have emerged: Classical Pentecostalism, which has its own set of distinct denominational groupings, began around 1900; the Charismatic Movement, which nested in various mainline denominations, began around 1960; and the Third Wave Movement, which emerged out of Fuller Seminary, began around 1980. But what makes them all “Pentecostal” is a shared, tangible experience of the Holy Spirit in spite of other differences they might have.

4. Pentecostalism has captured the attention of Christianity

today because of its explosive, global growth. Some estimates put the number of Pentecostals globally at 600 Million. That is incredible when you consider its short 100 year history in comparison to other expressions of Christianity. While getting an accurate count is difficult, the Pew Research Institute estimated that in 2010, of the 2.2 Billion Christians in a world of 6.9 Billion people,

50.1% are Roman Catholic (1.1 Billion),  
11.9% (262 Million) are Orthodox, and  
36.7% (807 Million) are Protestant.

But in that "Protestant" count, Pew estimates that a staggering 26.7% (587 Million) identify as Pentecostal and Charismatic.<sup>1</sup> Compare that with some of the other denominations who are in the Protestant piece of the pie and you get a good picture of the size of the Pentecostal movement:

Anglicans = 85.5 Million (10.6%)  
Lutherans = 78.3 Million (9.7%)  
Baptists = 72.6 Million (9.0%)  
Reformed = 56.5 Million (7.0%)  
Methodists= 27.4 Million (3.4%)

5. Pentecostalism has also shaken up the assumptions that reigned among Sociologists of Religion throughout much of 20th Century. According to Peter Berger (a renowned sociologist of knowledge and religion and publically committed Lutheran Christian) everyone, including himself, held to what is called the secularization theory of modernity, the assumption that "modernity would lead to the decline of religion." Now that the 21st Century is upon us the facts simply do not bear out that assumption. As Berger says,

With some exceptions, notably Europeans and an international class of intellectuals, most of our contemporaries are

decidedly 'religious' and not only in the less- modernized parts of the world. There are many large religious movements, only a few of them violent, most of them resulting in significant social, economic, and political developments. Arguably the largest and most influential (and almost entirely nonviolent) of these movements is Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup>

6. In what follows I will discuss 1) the historical developments that gave rise to Pentecostalism, 2) the theological hermeneutic that informs Pentecostalism, 3) the worship style that characterizes Pentecostalism, and 4) a few friendly questions and concerns that I as a mainline, law-gospel distinguishing Christian have for Pentecostalism.

## **II. The Historical Origin of Pentecostalism<sup>3</sup>: Azusa and the Dialect of Experience and Scripture**

7. The traditional marker for identifying the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement is a remarkable rival event "led" by William Seymour, an African American Holiness preacher, in an old broken down church-turned-warehouse on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. Although the lore surely supersedes the reality, the Azusa Street revival is said to have gone on non-stop 24-7 for three years. It featured preaching, prayer and an amazing array of spectacular, miraculous, supernatural wonders that were not only mindboggling but exhilarating for the participants. People of all races and from numerous national backgrounds are said to have experienced healings, prophesying, ecstatic outbursts, and above all, the speaking in tongues.

8. Significantly, this exhibition of spirituality did not go unnoticed by the secular media, specifically, *The Los Angeles Times*, even though it typically ridiculed the event as “fanaticism” and describe its prized gift as a “weird babble of tongues.”<sup>4</sup> In response, the movement started its own journal, *The Apostolic Faith*, which regularly recorded and published what was happening from its own distinctive point of view. It also commissioned missionaries, many of whom were long-distance visitors from all over the world who had somehow caught wind of the happening, got caught up in the spirit, and returned home to spread the news that Pentecost had come again upon the earth. As a result, Pentecostalism soon began to get a toe hold in many places.

9. In many ways, the Azusa Street Revival serves Pentecostal history much the way Luther’s nailing of the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg serves Reformation or Protestant history. It is a symbolic moment not an absolute one: One that cannot be fully understood apart from its pre- and post-history, and yet, one that contains within it the seeds for a radical rethinking, renewal and reappropriation of Christianity for its time. Therefore, let us take a look at that pre- and post-history of the Azusa Street event.

10. In what I’ve said so far, one might get the impression that the Azusa Street experience happened unexpectedly, out of the blue. That is not true. Amongst the Wesleyan Holiness preachers and teachers (those who saw “sanctification” as a second, distinct work of grace in addition to “justification” or conversion), the idea was emerging that there was still another work of the Spirit missing in the Church. The idea is that a spirit-filled Christian is not only one who believes that Christ is savior (Luther’s insight on justification) and who is increasing in moral holiness (Wesley’s idea of sanctification), but who is also empowered for mission, the initial sign of which

is speaking in tongues. This latter point was especially important in light of a growing eschatological feeling that the end of the world was coming soon, making the need for rapid mission outreach paramount. What better means could the Holy Spirit use to convince a world, duped by the naturalism of Modernity, of the truth about the Christian message concerning the reality of the living, active Spirit of God than through a display of supernatural power in this experiential way? As Pentecostals reason, just as it was by means of signs and wonders that the Holy Spirit through the Apostles convinced the pagan world of the truth of God and Christ, so also it will be through signs and wonders that God will convince the modern world as well. A chief figure among these preachers was Charles Fox Parham and the Bethel Bible School he founded in Topeka, KS in 1900.

11. Focusing on the Acts Two Pentecost story as the Biblical Paradigm of the spirit-filled Church/Christian, Parham surmised that the gift of "speaking in tongues" was the "initial evidence" that such a Church/Christian is existing and that subsequent gifts would, then, naturally follow—healing, prophesying, the interpretation of tongues, etc. With this conviction he asked his students to test it out by seeking the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" (which entailed waiting in prayer, fasting and expectation as Jesus instructed the Apostles to do) and see if the promise of the Spirit would not come upon them with same identifiable signs as evidenced in Acts 2. On January 1, 1901, Agnus Ozman was the first to speak in tongues and a few days later other students did too. When news got out that Pentecost had come to Topeka, criticism of Parham's school and students came from both religious and secular sources, calling it a "Tower of Babel." In light of this the students began to doubt if their experience was real or imaginary. This will be an enduring issue for Pentecostalism. Is the experience really of

the Holy Spirit's doing or is it a fabrication of human desire? With no clear way to test their claims, true Pentecostals are those who are self-evidentially convinced it is real and non-Pentecostals are those who are self-evidentially convinced it is not. Anyway, by April, 1901, the students left, the school closed, and Parham sojourned in both Missouri and Texas where he continued his work and slowly gained a following, especially, in light of his accent on healing.

12. One student who became convinced of Parham's basic premise was William Seymour, who, as we described earlier, presided over the sustained, three-year long, "Pentecostal revival" at the Azusa Street Mission. While there is no official count as to how many thousands of people actually visited Azusa, we do know that at its peak its official paper *The Apostolic Faith* had 50,000 subscribers. That the Azusa Street event came to an end is not necessarily inconsistent with Pentecostalism's self-understanding. From the beginning Pentecostalism did not see itself as a separate denomination among the denominations, but as a movement of the Spirit intended to renew every denomination.

13. Of course, that did not happen. On the contrary, as Pentecostal Christians shaped by their Azusa experience went back to their mostly Holiness, Methodist and Baptist denominations (with a smattering of Quakers, Mennonites and Presbyterians) to share their Pentecostal message, they were met with mixed review. While some Holiness denominations embraced the Pentecostal Movement, many categorically rejected it for a variety of reasons.<sup>5</sup> This led many early Pentecostals into the position of forming their own denominations by default, meaning they were also faced with the problem of making doctrinal decisions on the numerous topics that gave rise to denominationalism.

14. For this reason, Pentecostalism quickly ended up exhibiting the full breadth of doctrinal positions that tend to divide, especially, the various Evangelical, Holiness and Fundamentalist-minded denominations and associations out of which they came. In addition, as the Pentecostal message infiltrated into other mainline denominations (including Anglicans, Lutherans and Catholics) under the banner of the Charismatic Movement in the 1970s, it will also sit in relative doctrinal comfort within those theological traditions. Therefore, as a broad movement, Pentecostalism is true to its premise that the Spirit-baptism experience has priority over doctrine and faithful to its deep pietistic roots. But it does so with a sense of irony. For as it takes concrete form in any particular community of faith, debate over doctrinal issues will be unavoidable, raising questions about the sufficiency of that pietistic premise.

### **III. The Working Theological Hermeneutic of Pentecostalism: Supernaturalism**

15. As the above interpretive history of Pentecostalism discloses, the relationship between the priority of the Pentecostal experience and the role of Christian doctrine is rather ambiguous. This fact has not escaped the notice of those more intellectually inclined Pentecostals. Among Pentecostals, interest in the intellectual dimension of the Christian life traces its beginnings back to the 1970s and the rise of the Charismatic Movement within the mainline Christian churches. At the forefront of this intellectual interest is Swiss theologian and author Walter Hollenweger (born 1927), a Pentecostal who makes his ecclesiastical home in the Swiss Reformed Church.<sup>6</sup> Today there are hundreds of Pentecostal scholars and schools all

around the world. Significantly, interest in cultivating the intellectual side of faith is also being urged among Evangelicals generally as evidenced by Mark Noll in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994).<sup>7</sup> While the impact of this intellectual work has not yet touched the popular life of Pentecostalism, it is certainly helpful, I think, for showing those of us outside that tradition what constructive contribution Pentecostalism thinks it can make to the challenges that face global Christianity today.

16. It is important to remember that Pentecostalism emerged as a movement among preachers intent on bringing the experience of Pentecost upon the church in order to empower it for mission in the world in light of the imminent return of Christ. Critical of a church that they see bogged down in intellectual debate and institutional survival, Pentecostals decided simply to ignore this messy dimension of the church's life. Pentecostal scholars do not see this as an inherent anti-intellectualism within Pentecostalism, but the result of a mission driven imperative that takes precedence.<sup>8</sup> Determined to be nimble in mission, early Pentecostals postulated a simple, streamlined, pragmatic version of the Christian message of salvation to world, that they, in keeping with the basic theological outlook of the Holiness Movement, called the "Full Gospel." Four – some say five – theological topics combine to fill out the Full Gospel. They are: Jesus as Savior, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, Coming Kings, and some would add Sanctifier if "sanctification" or holiness of life is distinguished from Jesus' role as savior and Spirit Baptizer.<sup>9</sup>

17. Because Pentecostalism exhibits a substantial range of theological diversity, even on the meaning of the elements of the "Full Gospel," one overarching area of theological thought that Pentecostal scholars have been focusing on is Pentecostal hermeneutics. They in essence ask, "Is there a distinctive

theological framework for doing theology that is essential to the Pentecostal experience, even if the theological conclusions they draw on various issues differ?" Invariably, the answer is "Yes": Supernaturalism.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that for Pentecostalism, Supernaturalism does not imply a rigid metaphysical dualism or a two-teared cosmology consisting of the natural and the supernatural, but of an easy going interaction between a personal God (the Supernatural) and his creation (natural). In other words, they tend to take the picture of God's interaction with nature in Genesis 2 as more than figurative. While God may be invisible to the human eye – and in that sense Genesis is figurative – nevertheless, his supernatural work is apparent in fact that things counter to natural processes happen in nature. Therefore, the major premise of Pentecostalism is that God can and sometimes does act on nature in a way that circumvents what science knows as the natural processes. Indeed, this view of supernaturalism is the logical assumption to be drawn from the experience of miracles and religious ecstasy.

18. As Pentecostals reflect on the witness of the Old and New Testaments in light of their Pentecostal experience, supernaturalism is the common denominator. As they read the Scriptures they note that before the prophets spoke and the Apostles preached they were caught up in the supernatural working of the Spirit. Before Jesus discloses his identity and enters into mission, he is caught up in the supernatural power of the Spirit to proclaim good news, to perform miracles, to enact healings and to produced signs and wonders, with the greatest sign and wonder being his resurrection, his triumph over death, the victory of the supernatural over the natural. Not only is this supernatural worldview the presupposition of the Acts 2 Pentecost story, but that story, as Pentecostals read it in light of their experience, describes the supernatural

phenomenon that is the “initial evidence” of the bestowal of the Spirit’s power upon the church: speaking in tongues. While Classical Pentecostals, Charismatic and Third Wave expressions of Pentecostalism may disagree on the extent, nature and function of speaking in tongues, they do not disagree on the fact. The fact of speaking in tongues and other ecstatic, miraculous supernatural experiences is simply a given, by the Holy Spirit, that is self-evident to anyone who has experienced them.<sup>11</sup>

19. It would be tempting to assume that Pentecostalism has simply lapsed into the pre- Enlightenment worldview that Fundamentalism resorted to in its war against the Naturalistic Worldview of Modernism. Remember, Naturalism states that there is no reality beyond the natural, and that reports in the Bible of miracles and other kinds of supernatural claims are rooted in a pre-scientific explanation of the natural world. While many mainline Christian Traditions proceeded “humbly” in the face of Naturalism’s assertions, recognizing that the “Worldviews” of Bible Times and Modern Times have significant differences, Fundamentalism boldly repudiated it. This it did by asserting the “inerrancy of the Bible” in all things, including, its reports on supernatural miracles and wonders, which must be regarded as literally, historically, and factually true. But it did so with this caveat: namely, that God had cease to buttress the preaching of the gospel with supernatural demonstrations of power, as he did in Apostolic Times, because it is no longer needed. Now, for Fundamentalists, the Bible itself is the only evidence needed.

20. Although Pentecostalism shares Fundamentalism’s inerrant view of the Bible, it rejects categorically Fundamentalism’s cessationist view<sup>12</sup> that God no longer supports or buttress the preaching of the gospel with supernatural evidence. It is precisely the experience and testimony of Pentecostalism that

the Spirit does accompany the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders, and specifically with the “initial evidence” of tongues and subsequent wonders, and through them animates his Church. But this supernaturalism is not asserted, by Pentecostal theologians, to be a backward retreat into a pre-Enlightenment Worldview, but rather a forward charge that is perfectly compatible with the emerging Post-Modern Worldview for which personal experience and intuition takes precedence over institutions, rationalistic proof, and tradition.

21. While people today, including Pentecostals, have come to appreciate all the advances that Modernism’s naturalistic assumption has yielded in the areas of health, technology and the like, nevertheless, there is also a deep existential feeling that Naturalism does not tell the whole story of life. Neither the human person nor the natural world in which we live can be reduced to mathematical equations or chemical processes. There is something more about life that touches us on the level of “experience,” however that is defined, that cannot be isolated and studied in a laboratory or brought under our control and examined in a mechanistic way. Pentecostalism speaks to that feeling.

22. Therefore, openness to the Supernatural, Christianly conceived, which includes, for Pentecostals, both the forces of good (the Holy Spirit and her influences) and the forces of evil (the devil and its mechanism) engaged in “spiritual warfare,” is the hermeneutical lens through which Pentecostals view Scripture and the Christian life. While Pentecostalism with its Supernatural Worldview is still viewed with skepticism in that part of the world that gave birth to Rationalistic Modernism (particularly Western Europe and, lesser so North America) nevertheless, it tends to sit quite comfortably in the developing world of the global South and East as the demographics attest. What that means, of course, is open to

debate. A rationalist, on the one hand, will say that the religious growth of Pentecostalism is linked to the preconceived Supernatural Worldview it confirms in pre-Modern cultures, while a Pentecostal, on the other hand, will say that its growth is linked to the fact that it speaks to actual lived spiritual experience in this Postmodern Age.

## **IV. Worship as the Liturgical Encounter with the Supernatural**

23. It is important to recognize that the Supernaturalism of Pentecostalism is not like the Supernaturalism of Shamanism. Pentecostal Supernaturalism does not seek to compete with the scientific knowledge and practical benefits that Naturalism has yielded. Therefore, we do not generally see Pentecostal ministers setting up shop or walking down the street performing miracles for people as though miracles were their cottage industry. Indeed, that was the error of Simon Magnus in Acts 8. For the most part the kinds of miracles and wonders that Pentecostals experience do not happen in a demonstrable way in the world in general, though they do happen there, but in the church gathered, that is, in worship. The Spirit demonstrates its power and reality in worship because the purpose of those miracles and wonders are to confirm the truth of the gospel of salvation therein proclaimed. They are understood to be serving the gospel mission of the church just as they did for the Apostles in New Testament Times. Therefore, nothing is more characteristic of Pentecostalism than its worship. Worship is mission because worship is the encounter with the gospel confirmed by the Supernatural wonders of the Spirit.

24. To mainline Christians whose worship focuses on the orderly administration of the Word and Sacraments (what might be characterized as a thought-out dialectic of God's gracious

Promises and our trusting responses), it may seem strange to think of emotionally laden Pentecostal worship as following a liturgical structure and enacting specific liturgical rites. But, as Daniel Albrecht and Evan Howard have noted, the categories of liturgy and rites, while not traditionally part of Pentecostal language, aptly describe Pentecostal worship.<sup>13</sup> In general, the Pentecostal worship experience unfolds in three parts, which Albrecht and Howard call macro-rites: 1) an initial time of "Praise" that 2) builds up expectation for hearing the "Prophetic Word" that 3) leads into the "Altar Service" where miraculous demonstrations of the Spirit take place. While each may appear to be purely spontaneous, they are not. They are well planned, but planned in a way that gives freedom to the believer's response.

25. The formal indebtedness of Pentecostal worship to the "New Measures" of Charles Finney and his 19th Century Revivalist Movement is obvious. Indeed, the Worship Style of Evangelicalism in general is formally indebted to this style. But what distinguishes Pentecostals from Finney is the theology that informs the style. Finney fostered an unapologetic Arminian<sup>14</sup> theological outlook that ascribed to the human person an innate (semi-Pelagian) capacity to "come to Jesus." The purpose of the worship service, he believed, was to create the psychological conditions for doing this through the use of emotion and excitement. Therefore, developing culturally useful worship techniques and experiences to entice people in that direction was the goal of worship. The praise worship phenomenon in non-Pentecostal churches today are the direct descendants of Finney. There is nothing supernatural whatsoever in Finney's understanding of worship and the faith experience; it is purely psychological.

26. If I understand Pentecostalism correctly, it proceeds from a very different premise. It is not, in the least, *consciously*

manipulative in its intents, even though many of its critics will charge it as being *unconsciously* so. Indeed, Pentecostalism, in my judgment, seems to be at best silent or ambivalent on Finney's program and the Calvinist-Arminian debate that informed it – at least if the theologians I have read are representative. Worship is for Pentecostals an objective, supernatural experience of the Spirit not a subjective, entertainment event meant to move people in purely psychological ways. Faith and the Christian life is about the mysterious working of the Spirit to transform individuals who have been "born anew" and, thus, changed at their core.<sup>15</sup> Do worshipers get filled with ecstasy? Certainly. Could Pentecostals simply be playing out Finney's program in an unconscious or ideological way? Perhaps. But there is no way to prove that, and that would not be the assessment of Pentecostals.

27. In essence, then, Pentecostals liken Christian worship generally to what they imagined took place when the disciples gathered together on the first Christian Pentecost. Believing the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 as not simply historically specific but universally paradigmatic, every Pentecostal gathering proceeds with the expectation of experiencing the promised, miracle-filled outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Acts 2 reported. In anticipation of that promise, they begin the first macro-rite of the liturgy by singing praises to God, which "both lifts the congregants toward God in adoration and prepares their hearts for the hearing of the Word," the second macro-rite of the liturgy. During the second macro-rite the Scripture is read, a sermon is delivered, and other kinds of word-acts happen: Testimonies are spoken, prayers are offered, and prophecies are heard. Some may speak in tongues and others may interpret them. As Albrecht and Howard put it, "if Luther restored the 'priesthood' of all believers; Pentecostals have restored the 'prophethood' of all believers." Finally comes the third macro-

rite, the “altar service.” During this time the congregation is called to respond in any way the Spirit moves them. As Albrecht and Howard note, those who wish to have specific needs met in a tangible, supernatural way are especially invited up to the “sacred [altar] space where conversation, reconciliation, healing, deliverance and other forms of ‘doing business with God’ are transacted.”<sup>16</sup>

28. To be sure, Christians who have both 1) a deep appreciation for the Spirit-bearing – dare I call them, “supernatural” – rites or sacraments that Jesus instituted (especially, the Lord’s Supper) and 2) an experiential awareness of the importance of the penitential accent that pervades the New Testament witness will undoubtedly find Pentecostal worship and spirituality naively one-sided and severely wanting. But in offering this critique I get ahead of myself. The point is this. For Pentecostals, worship is an encounter with the Supernatural, the Holy Spirit, in an ecstatically experiential and outwardly evidential way, with tongues being the “initial evidence” and other signs and wonders accompanying it. Worship is the experiential arena that confirms the Supernatural conviction of the Pentecostal faith.

## **V. Some Theological Questions for Our Pentecostal Brothers and Sisters.**

29. I have tried to present a fair and sympathetic historical, theological and liturgical picture of the emerging Pentecostal tradition by focusing on what reputable Pentecostal scholars would identify as its best qualities and its most important contributions to the challenges that face Christianity and its mission today. Be assured, Pentecostal theologians and leaders are very aware of the aberrations and “tensions” in their movement: Triumphalism, superstition, chicanery, and anti-

intellectualism, to name a few.<sup>17</sup> Above all, they are very aware of how the message of the movement gets hi-jacked and distorted by Positive Thinking Philosophies and the so-called “health and wealth gospel.” And while it is true that Pentecostalism would have never ever received a second look if it were not for its explosive growth, as that second look is being taken, more and more people are seeing that it at least addressing many of the right questions, even if one is not completely satisfied with its answers.

30. The central question that Pentecostalism addresses is the sticky one of the connection between human experience and divine reality. Of course, this is not a new question, it has been asked since the rise of pietism. But Pentecostalism brings new urgency to the question in light of its extraordinary answer it gives. If I understand Werner Elert and the Erlangen School of Theology correctly, that was one of his central concerns, too. To be sure, he addresses it in reference to the way Schleiermacher and Liberal Theology, not Pentecostalism, conceived the connection. But as problematic as Liberal Theology’s answer to the relationship between divine reality and experience was, Elert would not accept Karl’s Barth’s “theology of the Word” which ultimately dismisses the question, lapsing into what Bonhoeffer criticizes it as being, “a Positivism of Revelation.” Wrestling with the question of how the divine is “experienced” is one of the central challenges to Christian theology today—and it necessarily leads to the question about the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology and experience. Indeed, that is Crossings’ concern, too: Crossing the gospel into people’s lives in a way that is experientially meaningful.

31. In what follows, I want to engage, in broad strokes, the two major foundational topics important to Pentecostalism that I identified above: First, Supernaturalism as the central

hermeneutical category for understanding the Holy Spirit and, second, the liturgy as the arena wherein the evidence of the Holy Spirit is confirmed in an outwardly experiential way. To be sure, these two topics are intimately intertwined and they cannot be addressed exhaustively here. Therefore, please consider this a humble start.

32. With regard to Pentecostalism, the first question that often comes to my mind by non- Pentecostals is this: Are the incredible supernatural experiences they claim to have “real” or are they a figment of the imagination? You might think it would be easy to test this question, but, as it turns out, it is not. For any attempt to find a rational method for testing whether a “supernatural” experience is “real” necessarily involves us in a category mistake. The best that a rational method can do is tell you whether an experience is “natural,” that is, whether or not it conforms to the laws of nature in a predictable, expected way. Since supernatural experiences are by definition outside the bounds of the natural, a rational method cannot tell us if something is “really” supernatural. Therefore, generally, ecumenical dialogue on Pentecostalism brackets this questions and so will I here. Suffice it say that those who are involved in Pentecostalism are generally absolutely convinced of the reality of their supernatural experience; those who are not involved are generally inherently skeptical of it. Therefore, the reason Pentecostalism needs to be taken seriously is not because its claims are inherently reasonable by the standards of Modernity, but because it is the fastest growing Christian, if not religious, movement the world has ever seen. Something is happening here—and that is undeniable. Perhaps the advice of Gamaliel is the best counsel (Acts 5:38- 39).

33. One of the most basic criticisms Pentecostals leveled against mainline Protestant churches is that they have sold out to the naturalistic zeitgeist of the Modern Age. The result,

they say, has been a world stripped of belief in a living God eager to bless it and a church bereft of the power of the Spirit to proclaim it. Perhaps the first thing we Protestants should say to Pentecostalism is “*mea culpa*.” There is truth in this criticism. Scratch the theological surface of many mainline Protestant denominations and what you find is not a bold confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and raised, but some variation of what sociologists of American religion, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, have termed “*Moralist Therapeutic Deism*.”<sup>18</sup> If ever there is a theological system that bends to the naturalist spirit of our age, certainly this is it. But is the brash, bold supernaturalism of Pentecostalism the Biblical antidote to this capitulation to naturalism. Might a naïve supernaturalism be as dangerous as a naïve naturalism? Might not a bold assertion of supernaturalism as easily miss the mark of the gospel as a timid capitulation to naturalism? Might it not be that, precisely because the New Testament writers lived in a world that took supernatural phenomena for granted, they had the intellectual challenge of showing how the point of the gospel was actually not about God’s might over the world but God’s condescension to weak for the sake of the world – that is, for the world’s salvation? And doesn’t that mean that Christian pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) needs to be foundationally a “*pneumatology of the Cross*,” as Cheryl Peterson has noted.<sup>19</sup> I also think so – and I also think that the classic text of Pentecostals, the Acts 2 Pentecost story, properly read with the New Testament’s hermeneutic of distinguishing law and gospel supports this view. Let me illustrate.

34. As Pentecostals zero in on the Acts 2 Pentecost story, they become focused on the supernatural elements within the story, in this case the miracle of speaking in tongues, and make that the point of the story. That is their hermeneutic. Accordingly, the

purpose of the Holy Spirit is three fold: First, it confirm through supernatural signs and wonders (Acts 2:3) the eschatological message that “the last days” are upon us (Acts 2:14), second, it gets the attention of the world (Acts 2:7) through these signs and wonders and, third, it empowers the disciples with supernatural gifts by the Spirit to explain these signs and wonders (Acts 4) to the world. The story is, then, regarded as literally paradigmatic, that is, it is assumed that the kinds of supernatural manifestations that happened at Pentecost is the new normal for any Spirit-filled gathering. As ingenious as this interpretation is for connecting Pentecostal experience to the Bible, is that really the point of the Pentecost story? I think not.

35. To be sure, the story *presupposes* a supernatural worldview, but does it *proclaim* a supernatural worldview? I think not. The story is all about God being present through the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with the world in a new way: not through the old way of the law, which condemns sinners, but through the new way of the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and raised, which offers the forgiveness to sinners. Distinguishing law and gospel is the hermeneutical key for unlocking the meaning of the text. Let me illustrate this with three points.

36. First, that this spectacle happens on the Jewish Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) is symbolically and interpretively significant. Pentecost was the liturgical feast day when the Jews observed the event of God’s giving of the law to rule over Israel through Moses, 50 days after the Passover. The point of the story is that that dispensation is now coming to an end. To use words from the prophet Joel, referenced by Peter: the law, has seen its “last days” (Acts 2:17), so to speak. From now on, says Luke, let this Day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, mark the beginning of a new day in which the Holy Spirit, not the law, rules in over your lives. What

distinguish the rule of the Spirit from the rule of the law is this: the law brings the word of God's condemnation of sinners, the Spirit brings the Word of God's forgiveness for sinners, accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection. This is a pneumatology of the cross because the Spirit brings the benefits of the cross of Christ to sinners.

37. Second, central to the story is not the first set of (two) questions that the crowd asked concerning the supernatural sights and sounds they saw and hear. Remember, those sights and sounds created "bewilderment" (Acts 2:5) in some (How can this be?) and "sneers" in others (Are they drunk?). Rather, central to understanding the text is the last or third question the crowd asked of the apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" (Acts 37). Significantly, that question comes in response to Peter's clear and poignant sermon connecting the fulfillment of the esoteric words of the Prophet Joel and the messianic Psalm of David to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the answer to this third question is remarkably simple and unspectacular: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). It is important to note that repentance *and* being baptized for forgiveness of sins *and* receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit are not three isolated things, but the packaged whole that defines the new life in Christ. This side of the resurrection, life in the Spirit has repentance and forgiveness as its basic law-gospel framework: the law's incriminations are acknowledged in repentance, and gospel's overruling of the law through forgiveness is received by faith. Whatever other features life in the Spirit might take on is open-ended as the Acts of the Apostles will show.

38. The third point concerns the matter of speaking in tongues. Undeniably, the Pentecost story tells us that the apostles

received the supernatural ability to speak in the languages of other nations. But again, so it seems to me, the point of the story is not that such supernatural phenomenon are necessarily part and parcel of the Spirit's way of making an effect and powerful Christian witness. Rather, the gift of tongues serves to make a basic point about the gospel that was important in the early life of the church: namely, that it was for everyone regardless of national origin or cultural-legal affiliation. Therefore, the story illustrates another application of the hermeneutical distinction between law and gospel. The nations do not need to learn the Hebrew tongue (or adapt to Jewish law and custom) in order to be included in the promise of the Jewish messiah, Jesus Christ and be part of the reconciled people of God. The work of the Spirit is to accommodate to needs of the nations, by raising up proclaimers who will bring the message of the forgiveness of sins to them. In other words, the apostles are free, as Paul would say, to be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23). When in Rome one is free to do as the Romans do; when in Jerusalem one is free to do as the Jews do. What is important here is the freedom the Spirit gives to the church, in this context, the Apostles, for the sake of gospel mission. In their administration of the gospel they are free to accommodate as they see fit to the language, customs and the cultural heritage of the people to whom they are sent. The Book of Acts is filled with examples of how this law-gospel distinction forms and shapes a variety of missionary practices by the apostles.

39. In my reading of Acts, then, I am not denying that the Spirit might work supernatural signs and wonders. My point is that, true to the character of supernatural works and wonders, they will most likely be spontaneous and rare, not predictable and regular. What will be predictable and regular is the content of the Spirit-filled message: repent and believe the good news.

As I read Acts 2, the Spirit appears to be the divine emissary who oversees two kinds of works in tandem: proclaiming and hearing. She ensured that the gospel of Christ was both *proclaimed* to the world (the disciples spoke in the language of the nations, Acts 2:4) and *heard/believed* by the world (the nations heard the gospel in their own language, Acts 2:8). The point is not how the proclaimers emerged – supernaturally or naturally – but that the message is consistent. And even if Pentecostal communities routinely experience signs and wonders every time they gather – good for them! – the challenge remains that they do not let the signs and wonders overshadow the message, that the signs and wonders serve the gospel of God’s love in Jesus Christ, as Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

40. Finally, I want to briefly address the issue of “evidence” concerning the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the worship gathering. Pentecostals make an important point when they assert that worship is not simply a human activity, but the arena in which God is present through the Holy Spirit to build up the people of God for the sake of faith and mission. In that regard, I would like to think that Luther’s description of the Holy Spirit’s work in his Small Catechism explanation to the Third Article of the Creed would please Pentecostals. One translation puts it like this:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all

believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

41. For Luther, the whole counsel of the triune God (aka, the gospel) is that sinners get connected to Christ and his saving work so that they might be reconciled, forgiven, justified, have things made right with God. The problem is, sinners don't have the ability to do that. With regard to God, they are by nature oppositional defiant. That's why the Holy Spirit is necessary. To paraphrase the language of the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is the one person in the trinity who is commissioned to take what is Christ's (his righteous work of dying and rising for sinners) and applies it to sinners (John 16:12-15). That application is synonymous with faith. Therefore, Luther begins his explanation of the third article of the creed on a downer note about our inherent inability to believe. He does that because it is very important for believers to know that they become and remain believers not by their own reason or strength but by the Holy Spirit. To claim otherwise puts them at odds with the Holy Spirit and risks losing what the Spirit has given them.

42. But how does the Holy Spirit do this work of creating faith in Christ? Are his means secret and known only to the Holy Trinity or are they public and essentially knowable to all? To be sure, in asking this question we venture onto very slippery theological ice, the mysterious topic of election. Therefore, let me answer it in a slippery way. The means by which the Spirit works faith are a matter of public knowledge, even though the reason they work on some and not others is not. Therefore, since the means by which the Spirit creates faith is a matter of public knowledge, it is possible to point to the "evidence" of the Spirit's work in the world. In his Small Catechism explanation of the third article of the creed, the "evidence" of the work of Holy Spirit is identified by four specific verbs

("called," "gathered," "enlightened," and "sanctified and kept") with the "Holy Spirit" as the subject or actor, "me" as the object of recipient of the action, and "the gospel" as the public discernable means of the action. We can unpack these four verbs by inquiring into them through four questions.

43. First, am I being "called by the gospel"? Is the gospel being addressed to me through the ordinary, objective means Christ himself has instituted? Here I think the phrase "by the gospel" could be any one of the five means of the gospel that Luther identified in his Smalcald Articles: baptism, preaching, confession and forgiveness, the Lord's Supper, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints. If this is happening, then this is "Exhibit A" for evidence of the Spirit at work.

Second, is there a regular "gathering" of people where the gospel is preached and the sacraments given and mutual love and support is shared? That is to say, is there a community of faith where the gospel is proclaimed freshly and the sacraments administered accordingly? If so, that is Exhibit B for evidence of the Spirit at work.

Third, am I being "enlightened" by his gifts? That is, does the fact that "He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers" give insight or enlightenment on how I think, live, and interact in the world. If so, that is "Exhibit C" for evidence of the Spirit.

Fourth, am I being "sanctified and kept" in the one true faith? That is, not only do I trust the gospel, but is that trust being nurtured and kept alive in me by the gospel? If so, that is my holiness and that is "Exhibit D" for evidence of the Spirit. For remember, sanctification or holiness is not a moral concept whose increase is measured by the standard of law, but a

spiritual condition of being “set apart” by faith in the forgiveness of sins.

44. I have no idea whether Pentecostals would identify these very ordinary public ministry activities as “evidence” of the working of the Holy Spirit in the world. They certainly don’t have the panache of speaking in tongues or healings. But neither would they necessarily exclude such extraordinary supernatural phenomena as tongues or healings from joining them as evidence. I would very much welcome discussion with Pentecostals on this.

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1 See Pew Research Center, "<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>, accessed January 18, 2016. For World Religious Demographics go to Pew Research Center, "Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project," <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/questions>,

accessed January 18, 2016. There you will see that of the 6.9 Billion people in the world 31.4% are Christian and 23.2% are Muslim.

2 Peter Berger, "A Friendly Dissent from Pentecostalism," *First Things* 20, November 2012, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/11/a-friendly-dissent-from-pentecostalism>.

3 Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. While there are many books that rehearse this early history, I draw extensively on Robert Anderson's thoroughly researched and critically informed study of early Pentecostalism. While the sociological criteria he uses to judge Pentecostalism is subject to the charge of reductionism, the questions he asks and the sensitivity with which he approaches his topic is commendable.

4 Wikipedia, "Azusa Street Revival," accessed January 18, 2016 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa\\_Street\\_Revival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa_Street_Revival).

5 Those Holiness denominations that embrace the Pentecostal message and became Pentecostal include the Church of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Those Pentecostal denominations that formed anew when Pentecostals found no welcome in their predecessor churches, include the Assembly of God (1914), the Pentecostal Church of God (1919) and the Pentecostals Assemblies of the world (1916), which formed because of a split within Pentecostalism over the doctrine of the Trinity. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa\\_Street\\_Revival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa_Street_Revival) accessed January 17, 2016.

6 See Mark J. Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. By Cicil M. Robeck, Jr. and

Amos Yong (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2014), p. 260. Cartledge identifies Walter Hollenwegen as the “Father of the academic study of Pentecostalism” and the brief *Wikipedia* description of his work and writings presents him as a proponent of a Pentecostalism that has something intellectually and ecumenically to give to the life of the global church. To get a quick look at some – a very small portion – of today’s leading Pentecostal scholars see Andrew Dragos’ blog at <http://seedbed.com/feed/pentecostal-scholars/> .

7 Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1994).

8 Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism a Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark: London and New York, 2013), p. 133-53.

9 Daniel E. Albrecht and Evan B. Howard, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. By Cicil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2014), p. 236.

10 Vondey, p. 30-34.

11 Mark J. Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002). As I understand Cartledge, it is impossible to test for the experience by empirical means because it is an experience that is of the Spirit and, therefore, beyond human probing. The point is to interpret the experience in a way that is theologically consistent with Scripture.

12 For a brief overview of this concept see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism#cite\\_note-2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism#cite_note-2), accessed February 17, 2016.

13 Albrecht and Howard, pp. 238-40.

14 Those wanting more background on Arminianism may find these two online articles helpful: "What is Arminianism?" at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/arminianism.html> accessed on February 17, 2016, and "A Lutheran Response to Arminianism" at <http://whitefield.freesevers.com/ritchie1.html> accessed on February 17, 2016.

15 Juan Sepúlveda, "Born Again: Baptism and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, eds. Jurgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel (SCM Press Ltd, London and Orbis Press, Maryknoll: 1996) pp. 105-8.

16 Albrecht and Howard, pp. 238-9.

17 Vondey, for example, seeks to bring understanding to those who are "perplexed" by the apparent lack of coherence in Pentecostalism by identifying seven fundamental "tensions" that reside unresolved in the movement. These tensions encompass almost every aspect of Christian life and thought as is immediately evident from a simple glance at the table of contents, p. vii-viii. In addition to Vondey is Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Backer Academic: Grand Rapids, 2005. He not only sees the many turbulence in Pentecostalism's interpretation of its own experience and classical doctrinal topics, but offers ways to rethink them and calm them into a breeze that might refresh and invigorate the church for today rather than replace it.

18 Christian Smith and Melina Lindquist Deton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press: Oxford/London, 2005).

19 Cheryl Peterson, "A Pneumatology of the Cross: The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism to Lutheran Theology," *Dialog: A Journal for Theology* 50/2 (Summer 2011): 133-142.

# THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNHOLY SPIRITS

By Gary W. Teske

I like the title you chose for this presentation, “The Holy Spirit and the Unholy Spirits.” I don’t want to sound like some semantics parsing politicians from years gone by, but it seems to me that the first task is to determine what is meant by “unholy spirits,” and then see if the spirits that were part of the cosmology of the Enga people of Papua New Guinea could be fairly called, “unholy.” And then secondly, to determine if those spirits that were so central to what we would regard as the “religious” life of the Enga people could be equated with the demons and unclean spirits that Jesus encountered and exorcised from people in the gospels.

I do not necessarily regard everything “unholy” as also being “evil.” For instance, I understand that I and everyone I know could legitimately be labeled as “unholy” based on the fact that we are imperfect and sinful. And yet, I would hesitate to label myself and most people I know as “evil.” The inhabitants of the highlands of Papua New Guinea believed their world to be populated with a virtual pantheon of spirits that, generally speaking, were more dangerous than helpful. However, I concluded

early on in my ministry among the Enga people that while those spirits could fairly be classified as unholy, I did not think it fair or accurate to call them “evil.” And so, my thesis is that the invisible beings with which the Enga people related through a variety of rituals that we would characterize as religious were unholy spirits, but not necessarily demons, and that is the starting point for considering the work of the Holy Spirit in that context.

Anthropologist Polly Weissner who has done extensive research among the Enga provided me with a chapter on Enga Religion from a yet to be published book on Enga culture. The final paragraph of the chapter seemed like a good place for us to begin our thinking on this topic. She wrote,

*“In Enga religion, beings in the spirit world were considered to be largely detached from human life on earth. The god Aitawe, the sky people and the ancestors were rarely believed to interfere with the lives of individuals or to punish individuals for wrong doings... Illness and death were blamed largely on ghost attacks by recently deceased close relatives...It was believed that the sky people and ancestors would help with the fertility of the environment and growth of crops, children and pigs if the appropriate rituals were held to communicate with them. People united to hold rituals to restore balance and harmony.”(1)*

As mentioned in the above paragraph, there were different types of spiritual or invisible beings in the Enga Cosmology and I will begin by providing a brief sketch of them and how they interacted with the Enga people of Papua New Guinea. (2)

## **AITAWE AND THE YALYAKALI.**

The Enga believed that there was a supreme spiritual being that

most Enga's knew as "Aitawe" although in the area where I served, he was also known as "Niki" and "Nita" and even by the name "Gole" a word remarkably similar to our name "God." (*It is possible that this name is a variant on the word "God" and was picked up by way of trade routes from areas near the coast that had very early contact with missionaries. However, I think that is unlikely. I learned of this name from some of the elders while talking about their understanding of this spiritual being*). Aitawe was often identified with the sun and was regarded as the creator or source of pretty much all that existed. Aitawe was male and the moon was regarded as female. Aitawe was believed to have spawned a class of angelic beings called "Yalyakali" who are eternal and who inhabited an ideal version of the material, visible world inhabited by the Enga. In the realm of the Yalyakali, gardens produced bountifully and life was truly good (epe). The Yalyakali had access to the "water of life" which was a key reason why they were both eternal and lived without suffering and hardship.

The Yalyakali (3) were the agents by which the material world and its inhabitants came into being. There were myths about the Yalyakali explaining how they were involved in the formation of rivers, lakes and other land forms. Therefore, the social structures and life on earth reflects the world of the Yalyakali and visa versa. In at least one story, the reason human life is hard and painful while that of the Yalyakali is not is that when human women began having children they fed their children with breastmilk before the Yalyakali could intervene and provide the infants with the water of life. And so, (almost a version of original sin??) the children of Papua New Guinea inherited a flawed life that, after the fact, could not be completely remedied, not even by the Yalyakali.

Interestingly enough, very little of the religious activity of the Enga people was directed toward Aitawe and the Yalyakali.

They pretty much regarded them as just a part of the Enga reality, much like the sun, moon and stars. Aitawe and the Yalyakali, much like the sun, moon and clouds were essential to their existence, but human activity, even religious activity had minimal influence on these beings. The Yalyakali were regarded as being responsible for meteorological events such as rain, storms, landslides and the like, but rituals focused on the Yalyakali for the purpose of deterring bad weather or bringing good weather were very minimal. Anthropologist Polly Weissner notes that after a big Landslide or storm, the men of a clan would occasionally have a feast at which the Yalyakali were thought to be present and enjoying the aromas of the food they ate. However, there were no special prayers (nemangos) or prescribed rituals associated with this event. It was understood to be just a time of fellowship with these benefactors in which they cultivated a good relationship with them.

Children were taught not to urinate or defecate in the sunlight or in the open where they would be seen by Aitawe or the Yalyakali. Such behavior was considered offensive to the sky beings. But unlike the ancestral spirits who I will talk about in a moment, they did not have required rituals to remedy the situation. The Yalyakali were generally regarded as being benevolent and kindly disposed toward human beings and so their anger over the violation of a taboo would not last and good weather was likely to return.

It is interesting to note that the early missionaries and bible translators chose not to use the name "Aitawe" for God nor the term "Yalyakali" for angels despite the apparent similarities between the Aitawe and the Yalyakali and God and the Angels. Rather, they initially used a term borrowed from one of the coastal languages of the native evangelists who catechized them, "Anasuu" for God, and later adopted the term "God" from the English language. They also simply adopted the English term

Angel with a Melanesian pronunciation (Enjele) for Angels. I asked one of the early Lutheran missionaries to work among the Enga why they did not use the term Aitawe for God. I heard back that at the time they began working among the Enga, they had not yet learned about Aitawe and the Yalyakali. Their knowledge of this aspect of Enga cosmology came later. However, in my opinion, the decision to not use the terms Aitawe and Yalyakali may have been wise. It seems to me that Aitawe and even the Yalyakali were too distant, remote and unengaged to adequately convey the sense of nearness of the God who we address as "Father" and even "Abba." It is also true that nearly all of the indigenous religious terminology and ritual were so loaded with the freight of their traditional beliefs that many of the Enga people, especially the older ones who remembered the "old ways" could not in good conscience, employ them in the proclamation of the Gospel.

## **THE "TIMANGOS"**

The other invisible beings that were part of the Enga Cosmology were the spirits of the ancestors who in Enga were called "Timangos." The Timangos were divided into two categories. There were the spirits of the recent dead who were believed to be near at hand, often causing individual cases of sickness and misfortune. And then there was what I would characterize as the "corporate" body or community of ancestral spirits (Polly refers to them as the "pool" of spirits) who were more distant, but who, when offended, could be the cause of widespread problems and disasters such as crop failures, illness, and defeat in battle. The "Timangos" were the spirits that were near at hand and were generally the primary and immediate concern of the Enga people. The Enga felt that if any of these ancestral spirits made their presence known, it spelled trouble for the people. They were almost always thought to cause trouble and almost

never regarded as being helpful.

I recall one old Enga man describing the timangos to me in this way. He said that the timangos were like a dog that suddenly appears before you on the trail and begins barking and growling and threatening to attack you. So, in order to proceed down the trail, you take a cooked sweetpotato out of your string bag (bilum) and throw it into the bushes beside the trail. And then, when the dog runs to retrieve the sweetpotato, you slip by him while he is distracted. In other words, most of their religious activity was not aimed at enlisting the help of the ancestral spirits, but in appeasing and distracting them so that the Enga people could proceed with the essential life tasks without being hindered by the angry spirits of the dead.

Missionary Anthropologist and Bible translator Paul Brennan wrote a book entitled, "Let Sleeping Snakes Lie."<sup>(4)</sup> This book provides us with an extensive description of the religious life of the Enga people. The title of this book points to the predominate attitude of the Enga toward the timangos, which was to keep the spirits sleeping and uninvolved in their lives. For, if the spirits were awakened (offended) and turned their attention to the humans, their families, gardens, pigs and possessions were likely to suffer in one way or another. The title of this book also points out that the corporate bodies of ancestral spirits were represented to the people by totems, quite often a snake. The reason for the snake being the tribal totem was generally rooted in a myth which involved the totem and the putative founding father, or family of the clan.

So, if someone spotted the totem, for instance a snake, it was regarded as a sign that the ancestral spirits (timangos) were upset about something and the clan needed to take action to ward off an imminent attack by the timangos. They would consult a medium or "spiritual specialist" (called a "topoli" among other

terms in Enga). The job of the specialist was to determine what needed to be done to pacify the ancestors and cause the snake to crawl back into its hole, go back to sleep and leave them in peace. These rituals were major events and involved the entire clan or even neighboring clans in building a special house. They also had special stones called "stones of power" (yaina kuli or kepele kuli) through which they could make contact with the timangos. The rituals almost always involved sacrificing pigs and offering the smell of the pigs to the ancestral spirits and greasing the sacred stones with grease from the cooked pigs while offering prayers (nemangos).

Of course, there are exceptions to every generalization. It is not totally accurate to say that the spirits were always making trouble and never being helpful. For instance, the Kandep Enga would sometimes make an arrowhead out of the human bone of an ancestor who was a great warrior believing that if that arrow struck an enemy, the spirit of the dead ancestor would make the arrow extra deadly. The assistance of the ancestral spirits could also be enlisted in identifying the culprits behind criminal acts. It was also the case that when the people gathered for the premiere religious event called the "Kepele" ritual, they would create a basket figure called a Yuu Pini which was a male figure, complete with a penis. The Yuu Pini embodied the ancestral spirits and in the course of the ritual, they simulated intercourse of the basket figure in what was obviously a fertility rite. From this it would appear that the ancestral spirits were being stimulated to aid in the fertility of crops, pigs and people and not just being coaxed into leaving pigs, people and gardens alone and free of damaging interference by the spirits.

However, for most Engas, it was more common to have to deal with the negative effects of individual spirits of the recent dead on an individual level. In this case, the person or family was not

dealing with the corporate body of ancestral spirits, but with a single angry spirit of a relatively recently deceased relative. And this was not occasioned by the appearance of a snake or widespread crop failure or illness, but by a sick child, or by the miscarriage by a pig, or some harmful incident attributed to the angry spirit of someone who had recently died but whose spirit had not yet moved on down and joined the corporate body of the ancestors.

I once had an evangelist come to a gathering of church leaders in a panic about what had occurred the night before. An Evangelist in a congregation across the valley had died, and this young man was sent to take his place. In addition to taking the dead evangelists place in the pulpit, he also chose to live and sleep in the house of the deceased evangelist. Overnight, he was awakened to the door rattling as if someone were trying to get into the house. Suddenly he was knocked out of his bed by an invisible presence and went screaming out of the house. The consensus among the other church leaders was that the spirit of the dead evangelist had returned to his house as was customary for the spirits of the recently deceased, was upset at being locked out of his house and having an interloper sleeping in his bed, and attacked the young man. They counseled the terrified young evangelist to put the treasured possessions of the dead man out in front of the door. Then, when the spirit came by, it would find its things there, revisit them and then, satisfied, leave without causing any trouble and would eventually leave the area. According to pre-Christian practice, if someone got sick or there was some other existential problem, the individual and family would need to enlist the services of a topoli (a seer/medium/specialist) to help determine what spirit was causing the problem; whether the spirit could be appeased by a ritual sacrifice of a pig, and if so, what pig? And finally, the specialist would need to prescribe the manner and location of

the sacrifice. Once this information was discerned by the specialist, the family would carry out the prescribed ritual with the hope that the spirit would be appeased, leave off attacking the individual or pig, and go away to become a part of the corporate body of ancestral spirits.

I got the impression that some missionaries believed that the "timangos" were to be identified with the demons and unclean spirits that we read about in the Bible, and that they were either the servants of or manifestations of the Devil. I always had problems with that. Most of the spirits they were dealing with were the spirits of Grandpa Nenge and Grandma Jopadama, Uncle Imbu and Cousin Muliwana. It just didn't seem to me that equating the devil with Grandpa Nenge was doing justice to the devil or Grandpa Nenge. I was happy to find that in the 1988 Enga translation of the New Testament, they did not translate "demons" and "unclean spirits" with the term "timango." So, in the Enga New Testament, the spirits who Jesus regularly cast out of people were not the ancestral spirits. Instead of translating the Greek words for "demons" and "unclean spirits" as "timango" they used the term, "enjele koo" which borrows the English word "angel" and simply adds the word "koo" which means "bad." So, the demons (Mark 3:22) and unclean spirits (Mark 5:2) in the initial translation of the Enga Bible are called quite literally, "bad angels." A truly traditional Enga man or woman would not know what an angel was unless someone explained it to them, but, I suspect it was at least better than giving them the impression that their dead relatives were demons and evil spirits.

The 1988 translation of the New Testament into the Enga language is currently being revised under the guidance of a Mr. Adam Boyd. I contacted him to see how he and his team were translating the terms "unclean spirit" and "demon." He said that they didn't feel that the Enga language had the capacity to

differentiate between demons and unclean spirits. They did jettison the term “bad angels” however, and instead used the term “imambu koo” which literally interpreted means, “bad breath.” However, as in the biblical languages, the term “imambu” can mean both breath and spirit so it probably isn’t too bad an attempt at translation. The usual invocation to worship in Enga uses the term “Imambu Epe Doko” (literally translated, “the Good Breath”) for the Holy Spirit, so using the term “imambu koo” makes the demons and unclean spirits the opposite of the holy spirit, and that might not be as good a way as any to think of them.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNHOLY SPIRITS.**

There is no question but that the timangos as experienced by the Enga people were “unholy spirits.” They were petulant, vindictive, bore grudges and inflicted harm and misfortune upon people. However, I do not think it accurate to regard them as evil or demonic in the sense of being the minions of Satan or the devil. And, what’s more, as the Gospel was preached and lived and as the Holy Spirit (the “Imambu Epe Doko”) went to work among the people of Papua New Guinea, I am inclined to think that the timangos along with the people experienced at least a measure of what we regard as the work of the Holy Spirit, namely “sanctification.” I am not naïve enough to think that all vestiges of the old religious practices were abandoned. I am sure that among many of the people even today, when a pig is killed, they dedicate the spirit of the pig and the aroma of that cooked pork to ancestral spirits. But overall, as the Grace of God has leavened the lives of the people, I saw evidence that it was leavening the people’s perceptions of and relationships with those “unholy” (but not necessarily evil) ancestral spirits. Let me share this story that I think might illustrates this.

Pastor Andale was a good friend and colleague, and pastor of the local congregation. He related to me that once a woman in the congregation had gotten very sick and died. And so, they had a Christian funeral service and buried her. That night, some of the people thought they heard leaves rustling on her grave and worried that she was not really dead. They decided that they needed to dig her up and make sure that they had not made a terrible mistake (after all, they didn't have heart and brainwave monitors to determine if a person had truly "flatlined"). Andale tried to dissuade them, but without success. So, they dug up her body to see if she was really dead, and not surprisingly, they discovered that she was indeed deceased.

At this point, they became very fearful that her spirit was angry that they had dug her up, disturbed her grave and might make known her anger by causing trouble. Shortly after that, Andale's daughter became quite sick, and he was concerned that the illness was caused by the irate spirit of the woman. He was supposed to attend a meeting at a church across the valley that would last overnight and he was debating whether he should go, or stay with his daughter who was ill. That night, the spirit of the woman spoke to him through the whistling of his daughter while she slept. It was not unusual for spirits of the dead to communicate through whistling (called "Yopo Lenge") that was intelligible to certain people. Andale related that through the whistling the spirit of the woman told him that she was not angry. She told him that when the people ate pig, she would be there eating with them. When they worshipped, she would worship with them. When they communed, she would commune with them. She told Andale to go to his meeting and when he returned, his daughter would be well. Andale attended the meeting which took him away from his home and daughter for a period of days, and when he returned, his daughter was fully recovered.

In other words, the spirit of the dead woman was still regarded

as real by the Christian people of Enga. It still hung around her old haunts among her family and clan members very much like the people understood spirits to behave in the pre-Christian era. There was still fear that by offending the spirit, the people might suffer because of her anger. However, because she had been a member of the communion of saints, namely, the church (something that is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit), the attitude of the woman's spirit toward those who had disturbed her grave was markedly different from what would have been expected in the pre-Christian era. She was still a member of that community and more importantly, that "communion of saints," and as such, she was not offended by what they did to her grave, but regarded the people in a kind and gracious manner. Was this not a sign of the "Holy spirit" working not only among the living, but also among the spirits of the dead??

I assume that the key question is, "what if any impact did/does the Holy Spirit have upon the unholy spirits that were very real and important characters in the Enga world? Did the Holy Spirit lead the people to conclude that the "Timangos" did not exist? Did the Holy Spirit become the protector of God's people and enfold the people in a spiritual force field that deflected the attacks of the ancestral spirits? Or, did the Holy Spirit have a sanctifying effect upon the ancestral spirits *as well* as the baptized people of God and actually have a transformative effect upon those spirits along with the people? I suspect that all three scenerios were true for some of the people. However, I believe that the last scenario was common among the people of PNG as well as being more consistent with our theology of the Holy Spirit.

In Luther's explanation to the third article, we read that the Holy Spirit "has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts and kept me in the true faith just as he *calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian Church on*

*earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith"* (italics added) . It is my contention that as the Holy Spirit called, gathered, enlightened and made holy the people of Papua New Guinea it created a ripple effect that radiated out and had an impact on the entire Enga Cosmos. We understand that the creation of the church, the communion of saints means that people have been reconciled to God and come to "fear, love and trust" in God above all things. But it also means that people are reconciled to their neighbors. There is a sanctifying of the horizontal relationships between people and their neighbors. I contend that as the Holy Spirit worked to sanctify and reconcile the Enga individuals with one another (including traditional tribal enemies in at least some cases), that reconciling work also leavened the relationships the Enga people had with their timangos or ancestral spirits. I suggest that the story I just told is one illustration of how an unholy ancestral spirit (a timango) was changed through the work of the Holy Spirit and became, if not holy, at least less unholy. I would contend that the Holy Spirit changed the Enga people and their world to the point that although the timangos were still real, they had been brought in from the cold, and in a sense, integrated into a new world view that included them as having been transformed by the Holy Spirit in a way that might almost be called "sanctification."

And, I found evidence this even applied to ancestral spirits who pre-dated the arrival of Christianity. In the Finschhafen region of Papua New Guinea there is a very unique church in a village named Malaseega. There is a famous wood carver who came from that village and whose work is prominent in that church building as well as many others. The ridge of the roof is supported by a line of tall posts which are beautifully carved in human images. The rafters slant down from the ridge pole to the side walls and then for a distance outside and beyond the side walls where they

rest upon much shorter but also artistically carved posts. These posts stand on the outside of the walls of the church, but are still part of the structure by virtue of them being the outermost supports of the rafters of the church. Those posts are also ornately carved with human figures.

If you ask what the carvings represent, they will tell you that the carved poles that stand inside the church walls represent the ancestors who were Christian and died in the faith. The carved posts holding up the roof but standing outside the walls of the church represent the pre-Christian ancestors, the ones who died before the coming of the Gospel to their lands. This architecture of the church suggests that those ancestral spirits are no longer regarded as lurking about in the forest, waiting to attack, but have actually been brought near to the present day Christian Community. Although they were not regarded as being fully Christian and part of the communion of saints in the same way as the baptized ancestors, there is a relationship to the communion of saints and it certainly suggests that it is not an antagonistic one. It appears to me that the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel of Jesus Christ changed more than just individual human hearts. The Holy Spirit sanctified more than just the human beings sitting in the pews during worship services. In with and under the sanctification of those people, the Holy Spirit was also sanctifying the very cosmos of the people of Papua New Guinea and thereby changing the nature of the timangos and their relationships to the rest of the community.

I believe that for many if not most Enga Christians, the Holy Spirit led them to see their ancestral spirits in a different light. I am not convinced that those spirits really did and do exist. However, neither am I convinced that they do not. In the same way, I am not sure if the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit just changed the thinking of the Papua New Guinean

Christians about the timangos, or made a holy change in the very timangos themselves. But I do believe that things did change for the Christians in Papua New Guinea and the change was in their understanding of the nature of those ancestral spirits and their relationships to one another. The timangos too, in one way or another, were encompassed in the sanctifying, reconciling work of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the truly evil, satanic spirits that afflicted the Christians of Papua New Guinea were the same evil spirits that negatively impact our lives. The spirits that are truly satanic and evil are the spirits of greed, prejudice, vengefulness, pride, covetousness and a few more legions of spirits that corrupt and debase people and their relationships to God and one another. They were just as present, just as real and just as destructive as we can find them anywhere in the world. They fought, mutilated and killed one another over land, lost pigs, old grudges, perceived insults, and countless other considerations that they considered more important than the life and wellbeing of their neighbor. The hunger for power drove "big men" (Akali Andake/Kamongo) to be as ruthless and cruel as anyone on the face of the earth. I spent almost 9 years in Papua New Guinea serving with the Gutnius Lutheran Sios in the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea. For the first couple of years, I was constantly struggling with what I perceived to be the extreme differences between the Enga People and me and my culture. After a time, I was amazed by how much the same we were and how we battled the same character flaws, the same temptations and the same demons. Me, my Papua New Guinea friends and my American friends were all under attack by the same unholy appetites, the same legions of spirits that like wolves, tried to scatter us and leave us lost to God, and dangerously afraid of one another.

In conclusion, I am suggesting that the Holy Spirit did indeed

encounter a plethora of unclean, “unholy” ancestral spirits (timangos) among the people of Papua New Guinea. But I would also suggest that the encounter did not result in the Holy Spirit turning into a Divine Ninja and driving out the unholy timangos and problematic ancestral spirits in the manner in which Jesus did as recorded in the Gospels. Rather, I suggest that the Holy Spirit did exactly what the Holy Spirit is famous for doing. The Holy Spirit has been calling, gathering, enlightening and making holy the people of God, and reconciling them into a new cosmic communion that transcends cultures, languages, races, regions and generations, and includes both the living and the dead. And so, speaking both theologically and from the experience of the people of Papua New Guinea, can we not conclude that the Holy Spirit has done this sanctifying work, not just for the unholy people who heard the gospel, but also for the unholy spirits with whom they lived?

1. *Chapter 17, p. 14 of a soon to be published book on traditional Enga Culture and Life written and edited by Anthropologist Dr. Polly Weissner. The chapter is entitled, “Enga Beliefs and Rituals.”*
2. *The information about the spiritual inhabitants of the Enga people is drawn largely from my own recollections of conversations and experiences while serving in Papua New Guinea with the Gutnius Lutheran Sios from 1975-1983. I also drew information from the book, Let Sleeping Snakes Lie, Paul W. Brennan; Australian Association for the Study of Religions (1977), and from the above cited work by Dr. Polly Weissner.*
3. *In the Kandep region of Enga Province where I served, the Yalyakali were known as Tai Akali. There were a number of significant differences in terminology and customs between the Enga in the central part of the province and the Kandep which was on the edge of the province and thus*

*borrowed customs and words from their neighbors to the south in Mendi and Tari.*

4. Brennan, Paul W. *Let Sleeping Snakes Lie*; Australian Association for the Study of Religions (1977).

[PresentationforCrossingsConference2016 \(PDF\)](#)

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# **“Fill us with your Spirit to establish our faith in truth” 1**

Crossings International Conference on  
*Law, Gospel and the Holy Spirit*  
Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin 1/26/16

**15** *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.*

**17** *This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. John 14:15-17*

**6** *“This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. 7 There are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. 1John 5:6-7*

*O Holy Spirit, enter in,  
And in our hearts your work begin,  
And make our hearts your dwelling.  
Sun of the soul, O Light divine,  
Around and in us brightly shine,  
Your strength in us upwelling.  
In your radiance  
Life from heaven,  
Now is given  
Overflowing,  
Gifts of gifts beyond all knowing.<sup>2</sup>*

The task given for this lecture was discerning the Spirit in the double- life of the Congregation. *Gift of gifts beyond all knowing*. I read the title and I started to laugh, because in 30+years of serving as pastor in parish, campus and seminary communities, I believe that I have encountered not simply the double-life, but more than 50 shades of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Double-life doesn't even touch it. I've even served multiple point parishes where one congregation was all sweetness and light (well, almost all) but their yoked partner truly resembled an evil twin. (This was most evident when one church council met on Tuesday evening and the other, on Wednesday.) Yet in every assembly, baptisms were performed, sins were confessed, Scripture was studied, preaching was heard, and an epicletic word was prayed at the Eucharist. Jesus kept putting his life into ours.

Congregational cultures are forged over time. Multiple generations are sometimes led by lay leaders or a succession of long-term pastors who may have ruled with an iron fist. Whether you're in a small town or a large city, your congregation has a culture, a way of doing things that carries remnant of its history and relationships (either by subconscious agreement or in conscious rebellion). 40 years in a wilderness seems like a

mere breath compared to 80 years bent-over by hearing someone's misinterpretation of a law that neither you nor even Jesus could fulfill. Faith becomes the parched hunger of one on a desert march, the slow death between just enough hope, and a despair that is unacceptable to express in public. And now in more recent times, I have also encountered an anger born of fear that runs like an apocalyptic undercurrent, that somehow, someone, some force was going to take this congregational culture away, and in taking it away, the church would no longer exist. At the very bottom of that fear was threat of both collective and individual abandonment that would end with death having the final word, for abandonment is the foretaste of a life that is the dust of the grave.

There are a variety of reactions to such a deadly spiral in many parts of the American church context, some which de-center the apostolic witness in favor of 'enlightened,' non-hierarchical sociological principles of democracy, in which almost every voice heard is equal (I say almost because it is a selective diversity); and the obverse reaction (a modern equivalent of Rome's bread and circuses) that projects the same fear onto those who are moving the culture of the political arena to a particular brand of "left," and in response provide a Sunday morning entertainment industry with enough fodder to numb the mind 24/7 through radio, cable, so-called "felt-need" bible studies, and the ever- ubiquitous internet. You can sing upbeat "Christian" songs 'til the cows come home, and then when your voice gives out you can just post your favorite slogans on Facebook to let your world know your brand of Christian identity.

While no congregation is immune to these forces, the church is still alive. In the warp and woof, the cultural and ecclesiastical yin and yang that pulls and tears a fabric to shreds, and in spite of all the ways that any expression of the

church can go astray, there are yet faithful people hidden within the love that heals, carried in the Holy Breath of the One God who brings all things to life, witnessing to a mercy so great that stones are rolled away. Folks who really are holding on to life by a thread are held in that gorgeous embrace of prayer and love—those sighs too deep for words. And being upheld in ways which the world can neither measure nor contain, they discover whom God created them to be. *This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.* I think back to my own life as a college student, when I had the self-esteem of a flea, yet the people in a little Lutheran campus congregation saw in me the person whom God intended for me to be, and treated me as such. Their quiet, actions, unnoticed by the world, were a catechesis of love, and lo, and behold, I came to life. I grew into the person whom God had created me to be through their love, and I began to speak, to bear witness to the incarnate God, who had been made present to me in their voices and their hearts. Through the years folks have occasionally asked me to describe what grace is, and while the thickness of meaning has grown, my answer has never changed from those early days: Grace is breathing after death. Grace is breathing after death.

Such life in the Spirit is deeply hidden. It is impossibly hard for the world to see, because like a seed that falls into the ground, it is only known when it bears fruit. And given all the visible divisions, all the enmity between peoples within and without the church, from congregational squabbles to ecclesiastical sabotage, the world cannot see any unity, nor on its own is it capable of receiving a taste of the church's good fruit.

In the United States alone we are now culturally divided into 11 geographic/sociological regions from 'Yankeedom' to the Left Coast to the Tidewaters to the Midlands.<sup>3</sup> People are desperate

for an identity. Within each of these “existential” regions (regions with which people’s identities are formed and normed) are economic variants, age variants, political variants, religious variants, educational variants, and cultural, historically ethnic, and racial variants. The continuum of rural, small town, suburban, an urban dwelling places means that children born the same day in two different places within the same country, and maybe even to parents within the same church body, may grow up to hate each other, or just as deadly, be apathetic towards one another, having no recognition that this is my neighbor.

What is so spectacular, however, is that underneath every fad and every division, every “ism” and every little tad of self-righteousness, every fear and every failure, every hushed duplicity and every false bravado, every wrong decision and every haughty glance, He who created us in his image and likeness is still at work in us, breathing us into the future that he is binding and knitting together through our sacramental life. For while the Old Adam/Old Eve in each of us is still looking to go astray, He who is life itself is bringing goodness where we on our own could never even imagine it.

The church is hidden in, with, and under this mix of peoples who make up a nation and who, for all intensive purposes, have no unifying meta-narrative. As a nation we are a people without a sense that what is true for me is also true for you. The church herself, which has a meta-narrative, (God ruling by his Word) becomes increasingly hidden in this multivalent context, for the layers of human brokenness and division are like scales seared on our eyes, keeping us from seeing who we really are together as God’s beloved creation. Until, like St. Paul, we are led by God’s grace to a dirt-filled Damascus street where there a faithful, unassuming brother of the church prays, so that we may regain our true sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts

9:17) Law, Gospel, and the Holy Spirit, this is the work of God when murderers (as we all are) die to ourselves and come to proclaim the sovereignty of Jesus, *He is the Son of God*. For until this world tastes death, it cannot hear such love.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander Schmemmann, the great Orthodox theologian states it clearly,

*The world rejected Christ by killing him, and by doing so rejected its own destiny and fulfillment. Therefore if the basis for all Christian worship is the Incarnation, its true content is always the Cross and the resurrection. Through these events the new life in Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is "hid with Christ in God," and made into a life "not of this world." The world which rejected Christ must itself die in man if it is to become again means of communion, a means of participation in the life which shone forth from the grave, in the kingdom which is not "of this world," and which in terms of this world is still to come.*<sup>5</sup>

As in the world before ultrasound, when we could not see the details of a child in the womb that was coming into this world, we receive our Lord in an incarnate promise: a promise that holds the power of life eternal, a promise that will crush the serpent's head, a promise that is hidden in the life of the baptized, a promise that the light will shatter the darkness, a promise that the leprosy that infects the human heart will be washed clean, until that great day comes when we sing with all the saints in glory, the resurrection song. And what is so stunning is that people who do evil to one another still are given this vision of the good, calling them to live in the light, to live as the light. *Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

This is the work of the Spirit, a ministry of reconciliation, where words of forgiveness break through that boulder stuck in our throats (that stone, too, needs to be rolled away), where we give not only the outgrown and outdated clothes to the Salvation Army, but we spend hours in what the world calls “leisure time” building furniture for the local homeless shelter or quilting for 1 of 19 million refugees. Where we step out beyond our fear to see someone of a different race or socio- economic class, or even a different religion, as a beloved child of God as we are. Law, Gospel, and the Holy Spirit: It’s all at work here when we are faced with both our finitude and our complicity in another human beings pain and sorrow. And then...and then from our knees, we begin to love. Then we can participate in myriad expressions of service to the neighbor, joyfully—not because we have to, but because we want to. And where in our everyday vocational callings, that which world calls our “professions,” we work in personal and collective ways to treat everyone, absolutely everyone, with the dignity and respect befitting a child of God. Some of us may also do the most hidden work of renewing and creating systems that make life more joyous for people we will never meet. Your incarnate witness will serve as a word of law to those who don’t care for their neighbor, and an embodied grace to those who receive it. Giving glory to our Father in heaven is always the work of the Spirit.

Such a life does not call attention to itself and has no need to mimic a world that needs to name its company on its polo shirts and its favorite quarterback on its jerseys. Such a life has no need to succumb to a tribalism that seeks to destroy our true identity, the identity given to us when the water was poured and the word spoken—*one Lord, one faith, one baptism—one God and Father of us all*. (Ephesians 4:5) For such a life does not easily fall prey for those devilish forces that divide brother from brother, sisters and mothers, fathers and cousins all.

What does it mean for the baptized to live this life filled with the Spirit? To live the Truth that is known by the Spirit, by the water and by the blood?

*Left to ourselves, we surely stray;  
Oh, lead us on the narrow way,  
With wisest counsel guide us;  
And give us steadfastness, that we  
May follow you forever free,  
No matter who derides us.  
Gently heal those hearts now broken;  
Give some token You are near us,  
Whom we trust to light and cheer us.*<sup>6</sup>

What does it mean for the baptized to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for a congregation, called gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover the shape of a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? *Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, that we and all who share in this bread and cup may be united in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, may enter the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and may receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.*<sup>7</sup> What does this mean? The Eucharistic epiclesis points us in the right direction.

Now there is a long and rugged history of the role and placement of the epiclesis within the Eucharistic Rite. Sometime the Spirit was called upon the material gifts of bread and wine, sometimes the Spirit was called upon the persons in the assembly, and sometimes the Spirit was ambiguously called upon both. Sometimes the epiclesis preceded the *verba*, sometimes it followed, and sometime there were both.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the Spirit was simply understood to be present when the *verba* flowed from the Proper Preface in the act of proclamation.<sup>9</sup> Yet in each case God is still understood as the giver so that the Holy Spirit

would *establish our faith in truth*: the truth about who God is, from the beginning, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and how he acts; the truth about who we are and how we are called to live; and the truth about this world and the world to come, the truth about eternity, that is, the truth about the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life, that we *may enter* it.

So really, what does it mean for each of you here to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for your congregation, called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? What does it mean for you to receive and to live out the Truth that is known by the Spirit, by the water and by the blood?

Every Lord's Day the baptized come to table and are joined in prayer for the Spirit to come upon these gifts of bread and wine, and to come upon those who have been assembled by the Spirit's own power. Within a continuum of ritual variations our hearts and hands are made open so that we might receive that life that is *the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and...receive our inheritance with all [the] saints in light*.<sup>10</sup> In some (often hidden) way the Holy Spirit is always directing our attention to Christ, and it is in and through Christ that we are taken to the Father's heart.

The Eucharistic epiclesis is among the most paradigmatic expressions of the life and faith of the baptized. For as Christ himself is hidden in bread and wine, word and water, so the Spirit fills the assembly with the presence of the Triune God wherever that community is gathered: the living room in a house church, a stone and stained glass cathedral, on under-heated city basement, or at the end of a gravel road in white walled church on the open prairie.

The Eucharistic epiclesis, however, does not come without a larger ritual framework. In the liturgical setting of the full Eucharistic Rites of the *LBW*, where the Institution Narrative follows the praise of the Father for creation, salvation history, and for Christ himself, which has already followed the Sanctus, the proper preface and *sursum corda* in which the assembly was called forth to, *Lift up your hearts*, and our very bodies responded, *We lift them up to the Lord*, we come to the remembrance (the *Anamnesis*) that recalls the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, and the hope of Christ's return, *Amen, Come, Lord Jesus*. And so at last we pray, *Send your Holy Spirit*, crying out in faith for what our Lord as already promised, *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you...Amen, Come, Holy Spirit*. And with arms upheld by the Spirit we pray beyond our own needs, beyond our own tribe, beyond our own borders, beyond our own fragmentary existences, and especially beyond our own fears—especially our fear of death by abandonment, to *Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.*<sup>11</sup> The Holy Spirit has directed our full attention to Christ, who is, who was, and who is to come, and when our attention is taken into to future which he preparing for us, then, and only then, that future, that eternal love, happens now.

For just as the Spirit descended upon Jesus as he came up from the River Jordan, and just as Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed "The Spirit of the Lord is upon

me," and just as Jesus breathed peace into the disciples who shivered behind a locked door, and just as you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, so now week after week, Sunday after Sunday, the Holy Spirit, whom you cannot see, but whose works you believe in—the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting—the Holy Spirit, is directing you to a Eucharistic life, a life in which we receive every breath with Thanksgiving. Our Lord Jesus says to us, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments*. And he has commanded you to, *Do this in remembrance of me*.

All those multiple contexts in which we live and move, but in which we do not have our very being, all those divisions are to be overcome, and indeed are overcome as the Holy Spirit directs us to receive the life of the resurrected Christ into our lives. In the words of St. Leo the Great, *The Spirit of truth breathes where he will, and each nation's own language has become common property in the mouth of the church*.<sup>12</sup> Hidden in the fragmentation of society and invading every sub-culture, the body of Christ sings his resurrection song. Whether we wear the faded scrubs of an orderly at the county nursing home or the sleek Armani pinstripe as CEO of a Fortune 500 company we are owned by neither one, but by Christ. Whether we are cooing homemade melodies of love in a baby's tiny ear or singing lamentations as we caress the dying, it is the Spirit of truth witnessing to the eternal love of God for those whom he has made. Nothing can stop this love, *neither heights nor depths nor angels nor principalities, nor powers*. Nothing can stop this love because *Christ has died. Christ is Risen, Christ will come again*. We who once cried for his crucifixion, murderers all, have now met him at the cross, dragged by the Spirit of truth kicking and screaming in denial of our complicity of our sin, but in a breath—born up as on wings of an eagle by this same

Spirit whom the Father has sent to carry us to the empty tomb. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, we are *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be visible in our bodies.* (2 Cor. 4:10)

There is however, one place where we all too often painfully see this life being made visible. It's not on the soil of the North American context but on the global horizon, and there we see in graphic and explicit scenes what truth looks like. For the Spirit of truth is made visible for all the world to see in martyrdom. 21 Copts beheaded, scores of Nigerian students mowed down, Iraqi Christians kidnapped and tortured, innocent young girls in nation after nation abducted and raped physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and then raped again and again and again: It is destruction and violation, defilement and desecration at every human level, and in this hell on earth these unsuspecting martyrs are speaking the truth, testifying with their whole body to the truth of who God is and whom he has made us to be, *homo adorans*, the worshipping human, trusting his promise, *I am the Lord your God*, obedient to his command, *You shall have no other gods before me.* Animated and empowered by the Spirit who is truth, martyrs incarnately speak his essence, which is truth, *Father forgive them for they know not what they do.* And speaking the truth about who God is, they simultaneously speak the truth about the world that he made, and the truth about those upon whom the Spirit rests, the truth that God's mercy is greater than our damnable ways, his forgiveness greater than any devil's temptation, and his love even deeper than any mass grave. Death has no hold upon those in whom the Spirit rests, for the Spirit is testifying to the truth in the lives of those who look to the Lord for every breath.

*O mighty Rock, O Source of life,  
Let your good Word in doubt and strife  
be in us strongly burning,*

*that we be faithful unto death  
And live in love and holy faith,  
From you true wisdom learning.  
Lord, your mercy  
On us shower;  
By your power  
Christ confessing,  
We will cherish all your blessings.*<sup>13</sup>

It is this vision that the Spirit breathes into the whole church, taking the resurrected life of Christ, and giving to us so that we may live faithfully in any and every context. We cannot fully imagine it, just as a young soldier cannot imagine how he would feel or act when the Stryker in front of him hits an IED and he finds himself hemmed in by enemy fire. None can imagine this, and all of us in some way or another are afraid that our fear would be greater than our faith, that we would be paralyzed, that we would capitulate, that we would submit to the evil that surrounds us, that we would seek to cling to this life more than to the promise of life eternal. But from the testimony of the martyrs we see and hear the same fullness of the Spirit who came to us in the waters, the same fullness of the Spirit, who in the words of the epiclesis attributed to Hippolytus, *blesses us [God's] servants and [his] own gifts of bread and wine, so that we and all who share in the body and blood of his Son may be filled with heavenly peace and joy, and receiving the forgiveness of sins, may be sanctified in soul and body, and have our portion with all God's saints.*<sup>14</sup>

God has breathed his Spirit on your hearts so that when faced with the fullness of the law, that is your death, you will be filled with the Spirit's gift of eternal truth, and you will yet proclaim, *All honor and glory are yours, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and forever. Amen.*<sup>15</sup>

## References:

1 Apostolic Tradition, Prayer of Hippolytus, Eucharistic Prayer IV, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Ministers Desk Edition) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 226.

2 Text: Michael Schirmer; tr. Catherine Winkworth; Tune: Philipp Nicolai, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Ministers Desk Edition) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), Hymn 459, vs. 1.

3 <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-11-nations-of-the-united-states-2015-7>

4 “The point of [the law/gospel] distinction is once again the making public of the divine deed, making it hearable in a world that will not hear it. The distinction is made so that a new kind of speaking might be heard in this world: gospel speaking...Proclamation, shaped by the theology of the cross, is governed by the distinction between law and gospel. This distinction comprehends the fact that publication of the electing deed cannot proceed directly to the world that crucified Jesus, but must bring it to an end.” Gerhard Forde, “Called and Ordained,” in Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden, eds., *Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 122, 128.

5 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 122.

6 *LBW*, Hymn 459. vs 2.

7 Eucharistic Prayer II, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minister’s Desk Edition), 221.

8 For a concise history of the epiclesis in Lutheran Eucharistic praying see, Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in an Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis:

Fortress Press, 2015), 33-66.

9 In Luther's revision of the *Ordo Missae*, the *Formula Missae et Communionis* of 1523, the *verba* is still within an Eucharistic prayer. Senn comments on the Formula Missae, "If this text of the institution narrative is compared with the text in the Roman canon, it will be seen that Luther has eliminated all extrabiblical words and phrases...It should be noted that this institution narrative is still included within a Eucharistic prayer, since it is introduced by a dependent Qui-clause. This Eucharistic prayer concluded with the singing of the Sanctus." Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 278.

10 Eucharistic Prayer II, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minister's Desk Edition), 221.

11 Eucharistic Prayers I and II, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minister's Desk Edition), 223.

12 St Leo the Great, Sermons 75.1-3:CCSL 138A, 465-9 in Stephen Mark Holmes, *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 166.

13 *LBW*, Hymn 459. vs 3.

14 Eucharistic Prayer IV, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Ministers Desk Edition), 226.

15 *Ibid.*, 226.

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# Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation:

Health Care for the Dying: Reflections/Examples of the Meaning  
and Challenge of  
Being a Christian and a Doctor Today

I want to begin by thanking you for the invitation to return to this gathering which I attended so many years ago, sometime in the early '90s. I believe they were called SALT Conferences at that time. I can't tell you what an honor, what a joy it is to meet in a place where the name and the memory of Bob Bertram is invoked and in the presence of Ed Schroeder. How fortunate, how blessed we are indeed to meet in this place. Like Peter of old I'm tempted at this point to ask, "Should we build a booth here, or maybe three?" I think, I hope, that both Bob and Ed would recognize their own hands in the writing on this human heart at least one of their many letters of recommendation. Any errors of omission and commission, of course are my own in what follows and what has preceded this day.

The broader theme which I have been asked to address is this: *Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation*. It's a lovely theme, really. There aren't many other groups that use language like this in my experience. Maybe I'm just hanging out with the wrong crowd. It brings back fond memories of Bob and Ed reflecting out loud with us about the gospel in this world, the one in which we live, and not some religious

imaginary world that nobody really inhabits. Many of our callings are in the secular world and I can remember as if it were yesterday, Ed and Bob teaching us that secular does not mean bereft of God, a kind of *sturmfrei*es Gebiet, unreachable by the Spirit of God. Rather it comes from the Latin root *saecula*, meaning of this age, also Gods age, but an age in which the law predominates. (Pregnant pause). Inviting, of course the question which will not let us go... so how and when do we, in the power of the Spirit, speak about and speak into this world the *saecula saeculorum* the ages of ages, the gospel, of course, which brings life, and hope and peace, on earth now, to those under the law, and in heaven forever.

The specific focus I have been given is "*Health Care for the Dying: Reflections/Examples of the Meaning and Challenge of Being a Christian and a Doctor Today*"

I have to confess that I have taken liberties with the focal point of "health care for the dying." I have taken the dying to mean all those who have been born... the young, and the very old, and everyone in between. It's not that relating anecdotes about the last precious hours of those *in extremis* is not vitally important and, even more so, finding ways to be with them, ministering to them, and speaking to them words of comfort, crying to them that their warfare is ended, that their iniquity is pardoned.

While this topic alone could easily and worthily occupy our entire 45 minutes together, I resist, perhaps reflexively, the notion that matters of faith are really only sensible when we are *in extremis*, when the only thing that makes sense, after all of our efforts have failed, is a hail Mary pass. When the doctors have all left the room, and for once, and only in this one instance, does the physician find relief in her or his ability to call for the chaplain. Yep, it's a chaplain's case

now.

Having been in so many congregations in so many different parts of this country, and having seen such a predominance of gray and silver hair at every quarter (my own hairs now included) I have begun to wonder if we ourselves don't bear some responsibility for this misunderstanding, that faith is for the old. To be fair, there are some notable congregational exceptions, also in this land, where a new generation of believers is being created. But I think it reasonable to say that these congregations are still all-too-often the exception.

So I have been stubborn and decided to speak about working as a physician and a Christian in, and among, the dying of all ages. This is my occupation and preoccupation night and day, as I seek to live out the calling that I have been given not only as a physician but as a father of four children, 9 to almost 14 years of age, as I seek to pass onto them the power of the life-giving word, the *viva vox Evangelii*, that I too have received. Unwilling, am I, to simply send them away, patients and children alike, telling them to go live their lives and come back when they are old and dying, and then we'll talk faith.

So what does the double life of a Christian and a physician look like? What is the nature of the "Life" that the Holy Spirit "gives" in the secular world of the physician, as Pastor Kuhl has described in his proposal for this gathering? In part that depends on whom you talk to. In answering this question my physician friends in the Catholic Medical Association, with whom I have discussed this issue, will move quickly to relate their experiences of living out and maintaining a "pro-life" stance among its detractors. This is at least part of their witness.

I thought about reflecting on being a Christian and a physician in a world where the Minnesota legislature is currently staging

hearings around the state for what has been called The Minnesota Compassionate Care Act. This act entails, in the words of the legislation: "...the medical practice of a physician prescribing medication to a qualified patient who is terminally ill, which medication a qualified patient may self-administer to bring about the patient's own death."

I must admit that the first time I heard about this bill and saw its nomenclature, I was transported in my mind back to a time before the *Wende* in the mid '80s in the GDR, East Germany, when the *Bundesrepublik* released a postage stamp commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Aufbau of the Berlin Wall and all that it represented. Within less than a week the East Germans had printed their own stamp with the moniker: *Anti-faschistischer Schutzwall* (Anti-fascist protective wall). That small stamp serves as a reminder to me that even in the land of the free (and I don't intend that phrase in a sarcastic way) we too have to be vigilant for the abuse of language for political ends. So that what is termed "Compassionate Care" is more accurately named "Physician Assisted Suicide".

Now, I don't mean to suggest that there are not worthy issues to explore here. And if in the desire to come to the defense of received doctrine, I miss the opportunity to engage with others, who see it differently than me, in a meaningful discussion of what it means to be "compassionate", not in a philosophical way, but at the bedside of one who is suffering, then I have certainly missed a golden, and perhaps God-given opportunity. Incidentally, the best book I have read on this subject to date was written by Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, published by Eerdmans in 2003.

Some of you may have known Allen. I had the good fortune to meet with him in his office at The Duke University Divinity School in 2013, for over an hour-long private conversation, just months

before he died in Christ... following a long and slowly progressive chronic illness. I shall not soon forget.

But I will not linger here on this issue, important as it is.

More closely approaching our theme, however, I thought about the topic of chronic pain, particularly in light of the national recognition of late that we are "confronting an epidemic of overuse and abuse of painkillers." "Opioids kill more people than homicide, state records show," says the subtitle of a recent article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Did you know "that the United States represents just 5 percent of the world population but consumes 80 percent of the prescription opioids"? Did you know that "in 2012 enough opioid prescriptions were filled such that every single American could take Vicodin, one 5mg tab, every four hours, for one month"? Staggering! Literally! I suspect that you have heard this and many other statistics like it on national news and talk show outlets.

"We here in Minnesota treat pain aggressively," my wife and I were told in our face-to-face interview with the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice, when we first moved there in 2003. Not a bad goal. But apparently, and we are learning the hard way, aggressive treatment of pain is only one horn of the dilemma.

The health system for which I work in northern Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin and most other health systems in the land are now back-peddling furiously, trying to discern which patients should appropriately receive narcotic pain management and which patients should be tapered off and offered alternative treatments for their experience of pain and their dependence.

Interestingly, for the past two and one-half years I have been intermittently approaching the administration of my health system with a proposal to start and develop a practice that would allow me to focus my work on patients who self-select and

who want to understand both their health and their illness in light of the resources of Christian faith: the Word, the community of believers, pastors, parish nurses, and services for healing. "Wow, that's a lot of health you've got there!" So might one spiritual conversation begin. "What are you going to do with all that health?" Or, "I see, that you are suffering. " And thus another conversation might begin.

Initially, my reception among the hospital and clinic administration could be described as polite, if not cool. There was some interest. I was told that at a meeting of all the regional division heads, including: cardiology, neurosurgery, trauma, gastroenterology, obstetrics and gynecology, primary care, and the like, my written proposal was discussed for an entire half hour. Very gratifying! Their conclusion?: "Well, yes, we think that faith has something to do with health.... But no, we don't want to get into that sort of thing."

With persistent effort, their reception over the past couple years has slowly been warming, I think. Of note, with the current crisis over the epidemic of the overuse of prescription opioids, I have seen a light go on in the eyes of some of the administration as well as other physicians. I can see the wheels turning: "Perhaps Braaten could take over the care of some (if not many) of the chronic pain patients who need to be weaned off." (The doctors thereby relieving themselves of some of the most notoriously difficult patients). Again, a hail Mary pass, late in the fourth quarter, as the doctors leave the room. Another chaplain's case. I see many of these chronic pain patients in my ER—some for overdoses and some with refill requests: seeing in their eyes, if not hearing from their mouths, "But doctor, isn't it your job to relieve pain?" I try to imagine how those in the administration anticipate that my conversations with those patients might go, if they were to approve my proposal. "You know," they might imagine me to say,

“if you just had a little faith, perhaps you wouldn’t need all those narcotics, to which you have become accustomed.”

Alas, they have not yet given me the green light to proceed with the project, but I can see the workings of the mind in process. “We could call it ‘alternative’ or ‘complementary’ medicine. Or perhaps ‘integrative medicine’?” And, not uncommonly, I hear spoken aloud even from friends who are physicians (though not necessarily Christians) that, after all, there is the placebo effect. (Subtext: “So if Braaten wants to talk about God, Jesus, the Spirit, and the disciples, so what! As long as it makes someone feel better, or gets them through the night, why not!”)

Well, I’m not going to linger on this thorny set of issues either.

I realize that I am dropping incendiaries, as it were, only to walk away. It’s kind of fun, actually, to have that freedom. I suspect that some of you are beginning to wonder though, “So where is this social, if not theological, butterfly, going to alight? What topic is he finally going to address, in trying to fulfill the task he has been given: to talk about the double life, the meaning and challenge of being a Christian and a doctor today. What does that look like?

The issue on which I wish to dwell is the *Sine qua non*, the “without which is not”. Without this topic there is no double life. No Christian. No gospel. No healing or life in any sense approaching *Zoe*. Only *bios*, biological function. The topic I wish to address is the one thing needful, the eternal issue in the midst of all the other topical relevancies, the *saecula saeculorum* in the midst of the *saecula*, the secular world in which we live.

I am aware of this double life every time that I attend a meeting with the administration and department heads of primary

care. How do I make the best case to them? What kind of arguments would win the day so that they would let me do this little thing that I want to do. I must confess that I feel something like I imagine the supplicants used to feel kneeling on the stones outside the gate week after week, hoping to be let into the temple of American healthcare.

Sometimes, I imagine, if only I could raise the dead. That would get someone's attention! Or perhaps that is asking too much. If only through a word I could make one person who is lame to walk. That might advance my purpose.

Before you dismiss those arguments too quickly, I think that Jesus understood them and was willing to meet that longing and that question in the public square. *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," he then said to the paralytic, "Rise. Pick up your bed and go home."* And he arose and went home (Matthew 9:6). Notice that Jesus didn't give the people gathered and the disciples a lecture on how true faith wouldn't require that anyone walk, let alone go home.

Sometimes I wonder if it is only nihilists, hiding behind the cloak of the theology of the cross, that want to pooh-pooh the force of that argument which Jesus acknowledges (in order that you too may know), that our deepest need is met, also on that level, of rising from our bed and going home.

Well, to date, I have not demonstrated that authority, as far as I know. But that does not mean that I am without *exousia*, the power of the Holying Spirit (see another Bob and Ed-ism!). The authority given to me in the gospel and which gives me no end of lightness and hope and joy and even a sense of triumph as I enter into those conversations with administration, is the authority of which the apostle Paul reminds me and to which I

repeatedly turn:

*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? (II Cornithians 2:15-16)*

The weakness with which I enter the room in those public conversations is my “*aromata*”, and is precisely the tool that the Spirit will use to make its case, *ubi et quando (visum est Deo)* “wherever and whenever God wills”. And in that I can relax, and enjoy the encounter.

What I would like to do, then, is to share with you just a couple of the arguments that I have used in that setting, the setting of the secular, the *saecula*, or age in which the law predominates. If you can, imagine one or two administrators and a couple of physicians listening to and considering this proposal: a clinical practice, extending to communities of faith and beyond, with faith in Christ, the word of the cross, the community and healing at its center.

After articulating a couple of the arguments I use in that setting, I would like to share with you just two vignettes of encounters that I have had as a physician where I could hear the proclamation, just begging to be made...to remind us to press the eternal issue, in season and out of season.

My purpose here is not a travelogue, a walk through Braaten’s life as a physician, a physician who also happens to be a Christian. My purpose through these arguments and vignettes is to marshal a larger argument, to make a proposal to The Crossings Community, or some part thereof, if anyone is interested, for a possible collaborative effort that I think has a chance to significantly advance the cause that has brought us

together for these days. Let me say in advance that you won't hurt my feelings if you return blank stares. This is just a trial balloon, a thought experiment. If you are interested, let me know and we can discuss it further.

So, to a couple of the arguments that I use in the secular world in which I live and work:

1) There are arguments which appeal to the biological life that we all share, as Steve Kuhl wrote, "...the life that God the Creator has given us in creation." When I argue that congregations could serve as a mechanism to help older citizens remain longer in independent living and could help break some of the silence and the loneliness they feel, I have their attention. When I argue that congregations could serve as rallying points where people in the neighborhoods, who know they need to exercise, or who suffer from chronic pain or fatigue, could meet and gather support, then I have their attention. When I argue that congregations could monthly, or from time to time, offer a new take on the old pot-luck, search the pages of *Cooking Light* (for example) and bring something lite and tasty to share with the neighborhood, together with the recipes and nutritional information written on a card for take-home, I have their attention. When I speak of congregations offering respite for children and households that have only one parent, so that there are fewer latch-key situations (yes, that's still a problem), I know that I have their attention. And then there is the obvious need for shelter for the homeless and food for the hungry. Not hard to make the case for congregational support there. All of these interventions fit under the current buzz-word: social capital. And the health-care sector is interested.

An article in the January 24, 2011 issue of the *New Yorker* by Atul Gawande entitled "The Hot Spotters" brought to our attention a new breed of health care provider (though very few

in number) that is focusing its attention on the large number of patients who return to the ER over and over again to receive care, and the disproportionate number of patients who are re-admitted to the hospital 30 days after a discharge for the same or similar complaint that brought them in the first time. With the horizon of skyrocketing medical costs and the growing proportion of GDP that we spend on health care in this country, these numbers represent the loss and waste of billions of dollars each year. For our purposes in the Church, the numbers of excess ER visits and re-admission rates reflects the number of people in our communities that are inadequately connected to resources at home and who are lost in the shuffle. If we work together in congregations, with pastors, parish nurses, and social workers to organize our efforts around these figures, we could get a sense of the scope of the problem, design an intervention and use subsequent rounds of data for quality improvement to measure our effect and alter our course accordingly. If you consider that Medicare reimbursement rates are now tied, at least in part, to reducing these re-admission rates, you can understand that when I discuss the prospects of congregational involvement with the administration, I'm certain I have their attention.

For these and a myriad of other ways that faith, or in the language of the trade: *religion, spirituality and health* can effect the biological, emotional and spiritual health of individuals and communities, I refer you to the work of Dr. Harold Koenig and others at Duke University, particularly succinct is his *Spirituality and Health Research: Methods, Measurement, Statistics and Resources*, Templeton Press, 2011.

Many congregations seem to understand these principles already and are well-engaged. It is truly exciting! Unfortunately, there appear to be all-too many congregations that seem to think that is their only purpose, as if the greatest problem we have as a species and the greatest need we share, the deepest level of

diagnosis, has to do with the food that goes in our bellies, the shelters over our heads, and the need for community, of any kind. Vladimir Lenin thought that and wrote about it in his tract *On Religion*. Once all of these problems are solved and the workers have the respect they deserve and their proper position in society the need for religion will fade. From where I sit, that has just not been borne out, at least not in the world I inhabit.

2) The next argument that I use to help move the conversation away from a simple biological understanding of health follows: Most understand by intuition that there is more to human health than the gall bladder and an LDL level. Few would argue that those are unimportant to one's health, but most understand that there is a larger context in which our lives and our health have meaning and purpose. Witness the proliferation of alternative medicines and reference to natural remedies. These, as opposed to synthetic medications fabricated and swallowed in pill form, give some a sense of connection to nature, to the earth, and to the larger world in which we live.

Many others understand their lives in the context of hope and courage, of purpose and of faith. Great traditions have developed over the course of millennia, which have given insight to millions concerning the nature of human existence. These traditions have offered, in a sense, a diagnosis of problems that people encounter on a daily basis. Likewise, they suggest a prognosis or way through to a future that gives meaning, hope or understanding to those who follow their precepts. Among these include Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism and many others. One might also include, for some, atheism or affiliation with a particular political persuasion as grounding both meaning and purpose in life.

3) At about this point in the discussion the issues get even more

interesting. One of the doctors will inevitably say, "Well, we have a number of chaplains, and some of the doctors even pray with their patients. So, we've got that covered. It's already happening."

At this I need to gingerly suggest that there are a variety of counsels, some more helpful than others. I usually paint the following scenario: Let's say that one of our fellow passengers aboard this ship we call life, or healthcare, falls over board. We quickly look over the rail and try to study the situation. We see our fellow shipmate struggling to keep her or his head above water, with the waves threatening to overwhelm. And we reflexively shout out: "I think I can see your problem! You're drowning!"

Okay. So far so good. We have a working diagnosis. An impression. All we need now is a plan. "All you need to do now," we shout... "is swim!" "That's great," says the one in the water, scarcely managing to stay afloat. "But would you mind throwing me a life-ring?"

The analogy is perhaps somewhat comical. But in essence isn't that what we are doing when we shout out to the drowning person that all they need is a little faith? "Hey, that's great. But could you throw me a life-line, something I can hold onto? "What is it," I ask my audience, "that actually creates faith, a faith that does not disappoint?" It is not enough to simply assert that faith is what is required. Like telling a drowning person that all they need to do is swim.

And then there are countless other words and images that proliferate and are recommended and touted as solutions: "Mindfulness! You just need to be mindful!" "Great! Mindful of what?"

And then there is another personal favorite: “Resilience”. I hear it everywhere, mentioned in hushed tones as if the one speaking the word has delivered himself of some new and creative insight. “Ah, yes, resilience. If only I had some.” “But could you throw me a lifeline, something I can hold onto? I’m drowning here!”

That is our focus. That is what we should practice, time and again, to throw the lifeline. *Was Christum treibt. Unam praedicam*, Luther wrote more than once, *sapientia crucis*. Preach one thing, the wisdom of the cross. Why does it so often seem that what we hear, even from our pulpits, is everything but.

Usually, at this point in the conversation someone will say something about diversity. “Well, you know there are many people of many different beliefs, who come from many different traditions. And we need to honor them, and consider them all.”

I usually try to pre-empt that argument early by acknowledging, as I did above, that our work as Christians, everywhere, but also in health care, is set against the backdrop of many great traditions. We are one among many, and we stand on no higher ground. These great traditions, as essentially healing traditions have offered, in a sense, a diagnosis of problems that people encounter on a daily basis. Likewise, they suggest a prognosis or way through to a future that gives meaning, hope or understanding to those who follow their precepts. Among these include Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism and many others. Even the Anishinabe, the Ojibwa who live in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin: the Leech Lake, the White Earth, and Cass Lake Bands, *Lac Courte Oreilles*. All have their great tradition. And our message is one among them.

Wouldn’t it be great, if the word “diversity,” rather than being a threat rendering us mute in the public square gave us all,

each of the traditions, a chance to speak and be heard? Sometimes I think that ever since Lessing and his essay *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (*On the Education of the Human Race*), there has been a powerful push to homogenize the religions, causing them to lose all their idiosyncrasies and rendering them either into a lifeless abstraction, or a gushing gnostic sentimentality.

I can't tell you how often I run into the assumption that really all religions are saying essentially the same thing. Never mind that the same thing that they say turns out to be the position of the one holding that opinion. The idea that all religions have the same message reminds me of Hegel's dictum about romanticism: "that night in which all cows look black."

I feel sometimes, that those who crow the loudest about "diversity," those who are the most strident, and who repeat it the most often, actually like it the least. The suspicion is forming itself in my mind that the word "diversity" is often used as a club, to bludgeon all who disagree with the wielder of it.

So what if, and this gets at the heart of my proposal to The Crossings Community, what if we work alongside others, to gather as publicly as possible a few representatives from a couple of the worlds great traditions, the most articulate representatives that we can find to bring their healing traditions to bear on a few good cases, people in struggles of one kind and another (medical, social, spiritual, relational, financial, or otherwise). How does each tradition interpret the problem? What is their proposed diagnosis? And if that is the level of the diagnosis, if that is the depth of the problem, what is the treatment? What is the prognosis? Sound familiar? Perhaps some of you have already done things like this and are tired of the project. To me it is exciting and could model a breach of the

impasse which exists when trying to get at the issues of faith, which have such an enormous and even determinative influence on health and well-being in ourselves and in our communities.

In closing, I would like to turn our attention to a couple of cases, two of many that I carry with me in my heart, my mind and my experience.

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**Duluth, Minnesota**  
**January 26, 2016**

NB: Steve. I need to pare this down some. I was initially planning to include a couple of cases or vignettes which illustrate a few guidelines for spiritual counsel that I use when working with and thinking about patients that I have seen over the years. Since many in the Crossings Community already do this on a routine basis, I wasn't sure that I could add much to their base of understanding by doing this. I therefore have chosen to try to depict the double life of a Christian and doctor, as I experience it. As I edit this down, I may still include an anecdote or two, but this should suffice for a respondent to prepare a comment or two.

Thanks again for involving me in this conference. I look forward to seeing you there. –Arndt

[DiscerningtheSpiritintheDoubleLifeofChristianVocation \(PDF\)](#)

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# **Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Congregation/Church: The Japanese Context**

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## **1. Introduction**

Presenting on preaching in the Japanese context is a challenging topic, for my experience is in reality merely that of one pastor who has been ordained for only five years. Thus, I do not pretend to know everything about Japan. Rather, I would like to emphasize my limitation of experience. Nonetheless, I may be able to offer a glimpse of the issue of preaching, for I have been struggling to find out for myself what it means to be both a Lutheran and a pastor—or, a Lutheran pastor—in the Japanese context.

In this presentation, I would like to talk about 1) significant differences between the so-called western context and a non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic context, particularly the Japanese context; 2) basic understandings of Lutheran preaching especially concerning its limitations; and 3) the role of preaching in the Japanese context from a Lutheran perspective, asserting that the Lutheran preaching has a special function in the modern Japanese context, namely that it frees Christians

from their legalistic burdens and for the life of service to their neighbors in the penultimate world where a human law governs a society.

Before moving forward, I would like to refer to my theological presuppositions for this presentation. I subscribe to the law and gospel, the first and second uses of the law, and the theology of the cross as the revelation of God for us where we by reason least expect God to be. Because of the limitation of time and space, I intentionally leave some important theological principles untouched and instead focus on what appears unique or more important to my assigned subject. I hope this reference to the presuppositions helps you to understand where I stand in my theologization.

## **2. Japanese Context**

This main section of the presentation looks at two major aspects of the Japanese context: ethics shaped by a non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition and the problem of legalism among Japanese Christians.

### **2.1. Region and Ethics in a non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic Context**

In order to talk about preaching in the Japanese context, it is important to sort out the relation between religion and ethics in the Japanese society. Is there any clear relation between the two? If so, what is it? I would like to share a short story.

When I was visiting Germany last year, I had an interesting experience somewhat related to what is currently going on over there. Because I was a foreigner, some drunken young men threw a nearly-empty beer bottle at me across the street, although it did not hit me. I later learned about the PEGIDA and the

LEGIDA—anti-Islamization movements—and then had a chance to visit with a retired Lutheran pastor and talked about the issue.<sup>1</sup> He said that such anti-refugee activities would not fit with Christian values and principles. When I asked him if there existed a clear sense of being “public” in his pastoral work, he further answered, saying, there was no distinction between public and private in the pastoral work in Germany because pastors were, by receiving salary from the state, public figures and whatever they would do in the church—or the church would do—were always “public.” I will come back later to this topic of “public” and “private.”

This conversation reminded me of the preface of Inazoh Nitobe’s book: *Bushido*.<sup>2</sup> There, Nitobe, a Japanese Christian leader of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, describes how the inception of his book came to be. When he was visiting with a certain Belgian professor of law, they talked about the subject of religion among other things. The professor asked Nitobe what would serve as the basis of ethics for the Japanese people if there was no religious education at school. Nitobe’s answer was “Bushido,” a Japanese chivalry or a behavioral code of Samurai which was an eclecticism of Zen Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism shaped over a long time. This perhaps holds some truth to the modern Japan, too, although it is naïve to believe that “Bushido” is truly retained by the contemporary Japanese society. Nevertheless, it is also true that already by the time of Nitobe “Bushido” in its strict sense was long gone as Japan was quickly westernized and became a modern nation.<sup>3</sup>

This vignette tells us an important thing regarding a non-Christian society and its ethics: such a society can develop its own ethics independent of the Judeo-Christian—or, perhaps, Judeo-Christian-Islamic—tradition and that ethics may not necessarily be inferior to ethics shaped by and in a society where the aforementioned tradition is culturally predominant.<sup>4</sup>

Through the earthquakes, Tsunamis, and what followed afterwards including nuclear power plant incidents in 2011, Japanese people clearly demonstrated that a non-Christian people can act ethically as equally as Christians or perhaps even better. Nonetheless, we—including Japanese Christians themselves—often misunderstand that Christian values and principles do offer better ethical standard to a society; we sometimes go even further, thinking that Christianity is the only religion which could offer any acceptable ethical teachings to humanity. Yet, there are many non-Christian societies and communities which have good ethical standard and reasonably practice it. Then, the question about preaching especially the law we should think twice before we start preaching with an intention to keep the society good or make it better, for many communities are just fine without learning from Christian ethical teachings.

It is important to note, however, that Nitobe believed that each culture including that in Japan had its own “Old Testament.”<sup>5</sup> This understanding probably resembles the conference’s definition of “life” with small letter, the life created by God the creator. It is also important to remember that Bushido was an eclecticism of religious teachings, values, and principles adopted and practiced in the Japanese context.<sup>6</sup> In other words, what Nitobe claimed to be the basis of the Japanese ethical code of his time was a product of religions even though they were not Christianity.

Connecting religion and ethics was indeed a common practice in Japan up to the end of the Second World War. The Meiji Restoration was in its initial stage an attempt to reorganize Japan under the framework of Shinto and the imperial worship against the backdrop of the threat of potential colonization of Japan under the western power.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the leaders thought that against the external threat posed by the western nations they could restore Japan and its people to what they

believed to be an authentic form of Shinto and thus establish Japan's national identity by appealing to that confessional identity and its resulting appropriate practice including ethics. *The Imperial Rescript on Education* issued in 1890 was nothing but an attempt to establish ethics based on this agenda.<sup>8</sup> In the 1880s and the following few decades in the process of Japan's modernization and westernization, some people tried to adopt a Unitarianism from the U.S. as Japan's state religion. In 1912, the government initiated *Sankyō Kaidō*, a meeting of three religions—Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity—with an intention to use these religions and their influence upon the Japanese citizens for their better moral edification.<sup>9</sup> Under the government-initiated United Church of Christ in Japan during World War II, virtually all the Christian churches in Japan with an exception of Pentecostal churches became subsumed under the state-sanctioned imperial Shinto and were used to promote Japan's wartime nationalism and colonial agenda.<sup>10</sup>

If the question is merely a clear relation between religion and ethics, there exists little difference between Japan and a nation shaped in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. The difference, then, is that the religions which Japan's ethics is based on or primarily influenced by are neither Judaism, Christianity, nor Islam, the faiths presumably with the common root of worshiping the same monotheistic God (Abrahamic religions). This however could cast a serious obstacle to Christians including those in Japan, for the question being asked really is whether Christians can trust an ethics derived from a non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic religion and/or culture.

## **2.2.Church and State/Religion and Politics**

Shinto and Buddhism existed side by side in Japan before the Meiji Restoration, although there were times when the one

persecuted the other or the other way around. The Meiji Restoration initially claimed Shinto as the sole religion of Japan and attempted to make Buddhist faith null.<sup>11</sup> This attempt by the government's religious leaders failed. Yet, Christian faith was officially not permitted for the Japanese people until the issuance of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. In the constitution, the freedom of religion was permitted as long as it would not harm the social order nor contradict the duty of a Japanese citizen.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Shinto was considered a non-religion and thus granted an exception to the article, for Shinto was understood to be practiced by every Japanese citizen. *The Imperial Rescript on Education* in 1890, issued just a year after the constitution, clearly implies this special nature of Shinto and imperial worship.<sup>13</sup> How Christianity was treated until the end of World War II has been already mentioned. Thus, Shinto, a religion labeled as a non-religion, and the State were inseparable; consequently, under this umbrella of the state "non-religion," Buddhism and Christianity, other religions, were also used for Japan's imperialistic agenda.

The relation changed after the war especially when Japan accepted its new constitution reflecting a new understanding of the emperor—no longer as a deity but as a symbol of the nation. The ideology promoted and imposed prior to that point was quickly nullified. Perhaps the claim that Shinto was a non-religion brought upon Shinto itself a serious harm, for Shinto has become merely a socio-cultural entity to most Japanese people.<sup>14</sup>

The freedom of religion without any limitation was assured in the new constitution.<sup>15</sup> This together with the emperor's becoming a human being meant the end of the state-sanctioned Shinto and consequently the separation of church and state. Yet, in Japan it is more accurate to describe the separation as that between religion and politics; it is indeed a much stricter

separation than the former.<sup>16</sup> This practice has generated negative reactions of many citizens including Christians to any attempt to bring religion and politics together and continues to do so today. Initiating a serious political discussion in a church is often met by a polite reprove. If a pastor initiates such a discussion or takes a stance for or against even loosely political issues, she is criticized to have made some people potentially in her congregation uncomfortable by excluding them from the circle.

## **2.3. Legalist or Antinomian—The Reality of Churchgoers as Legalists**

Last fall I had a chance to hear Dr. Fleming Rutledge, an Episcopal theologian, speak at a conference. She gave a keynote lecture titled: “Are You a Corinthian or a Galatian? Theological Grounding for Pastors.”<sup>17</sup> In the lecture, she distinguished between the pastors with legalistic inclination and those with antinomian inclination, identifying the former with Galatians and the latter with Corinthians, challenging pastors to think where their orientations were and that of the gospel. It was really an insightful lecture, posing an important question for pastors to wrestle with as they serve their congregations.

This question of being legalist or antinomian is important for pastors and those who have some theological training. Indeed, anyone who has some pastoral experience must have struggled over this issue. Yet, when we think about our congregants, the question all of a sudden becomes inadequate, for we already know that virtually everyone who regularly or semi-regularly comes to the church today is legalist.

Legalist here is used to designate someone who consciously or unconsciously believes that he could become better or make his relationship with God better by doing something good. Those who

have no legalistic inclination would not even come to the church; antinomians would simply stay at home or do something else, for they do not care. Indeed, the question of legalist and antinomian inclination and tendency is perhaps a luxury granted to those who have to come to the church every week, that is to say, pastors. Maybe the issue is serious for those non-pastoral individuals who are forced to come to the church such as pastor's family members or young people, but the majority of the people who come to the church today are most likely legalist. Pastors including myself often forget this reality or overlook it. This is even more so in Japan where Christianity is a minority religion, for those who identify themselves with it by taking a risk of being minority tend to have clearer agenda than those who do so in the place where Christianity is a majority religion.

This legalism of Japanese Christians is often manifested in their sense of duty associated with the understanding of their idealistic or ideological Christian identity. One such manifestation is found in their strict observance of the separation of religion and politics. Earlier I have touched upon the issue of "public" and "private" in the pastoral office. In Germany, pastors are public figures because they receive a salary from the state. The same logic applies to the pastors in Japan and the U.S., exacting however a different conclusion because they receive a salary from the church, a private sector, which makes them private figures. This understanding is perhaps endorsed by the modern understanding of religion that it is a private business of an individual.

What is interesting, however, is that private and public intersect not only differently but also in an unexpected way in Germany and in Japan. In Germany where the pastor is a public figure, everything the pastor does is public. There pastors are also expected to be involved in the shaping and practicing of

morality and ethics in the society. Consequently, what pastors believe to be right and thus practice becomes a public statement. To put it differently, there lacks a clear distinction between a private persona and a public persona of a pastor, because they are always connected to each other.

In Japan, however, where the pastor is understood to belong to a private or non-public sector and thus to be a private figure, she is expected to behave strictly as a public figure in her limited non-public domain, namely, her church and congregation. In this limited arena, she is expected carefully to distinguish and separate her private beliefs, opinions, practices from her public expectation as a pastor; a public persona as a pastor who must not offend nor show partiality toward anyone in the church and congregation is thus imposed upon the pastor.

This public persona of a pastor is an ideological abstraction generated from the understanding on what Christianity should be like and what a pastor should look like shared by both Christians and non-Christians in Japan. On the one hand, the non-Christian populace expects Christianity and Christians to provide a role model for both morality and social justice. This is perhaps evident from the Japanese society's wide recognition of and respect to two Christian figures: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa. On the other hand, the Christian populace buys into this understanding, expecting themselves able to manifest that ideal in their lives or, if they themselves are unable, at least others especially those who officially work in the church to be able. Moral perfectionism is a problem inherent to any system concerning human life especially ethics which bases itself on the positive anthropology, but it is ironic that Christians buy into it at the expense of practicing forgiveness in the church.

The result is the suffocation of Japanese Christians who impose

upon themselves unnecessary burdens of Christian idealism and ideology and thus are voluntarily enslaved to the idols which they worship as God. This legalism is a serious problem for Japanese Christians today to live as Christians in the Japanese context.

## **3. Preaching and Its Limitations from the Lutheran Perspective**

### **3.1. *Executio Dei* and *Jus Verbi***

Here I briefly introduce two concepts from Luther's *Invocavit* sermons which shows the nature and limitation of human involvement in preaching: *executio Dei* and *jus verbi*. In 1522, Luther delivered a series of eight sermons upon his return from Wartburg, addressing to those who supported the hasty and aggressive reform program of Andreas Karlstadt and those who were reluctant to accept his changes due to their weak faith. Luther is thus concerned with the one group adhering to the Catholic teachings and practices and the other group, the evangelical cause.

In the second sermon, Luther introduces a set of important principles concerning the Word of God: the *jus verbi* and the *executio*. He lays out a profound theology of the Word of God in this sermon, and this theology serves as the fundamental principle of reform. He emphasizes that preachers must preach and teach the Word of God, but he acknowledges that they must allow God—God's Word—to work alone apart from their work and interference.<sup>18</sup> Luther reminds his congregants that they cannot force anyone to have faith, for neither he nor they can reach people's hearts and pour faith into them.<sup>19</sup> On this regard to salvation, humans "have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]";<sup>20</sup> the former is human

responsibility, while the latter is to be entrusted to God alone. Luther keeps this distinction clearly throughout the *Invocavit* sermons.

This brief introduction of the two terms reminds pastors what they are capable—or, incapable—of through preaching. They cannot make people Christian or those who are already Christians better Christian. What pastors can do is to let Christians be Christian by helping them to remember who they already are and encourage them to actualize that identity in their life.

## **4. Freeing Both Clerical and Lay Japanese Christians through Preaching**

### **4.1. Japanized Christianity or Christianized Japan—A Wrong Question**

When Christians talk about Christianity in Japan, they often talk about two possible forms of its successful presence: Japanized Christianity or Christianized Japan. Both result from the missiological framework of contextualization, inculturation, or indigenization. The former is a manifestation of Japanese socio-cultural influences in Christianity, while the latter is a transformation of Japan under or around values and principles which are traditionally identified Christian.<sup>21</sup> Neither have really prevailed in Japan. In *Christianity Made in Japan*, Mark Mullins introduces some forms of Japanized Christianity, but Kanzoh Uchimura's *Mukyōkai* (non-Church movement) is really the only successful case within the framework of orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

Conceptualizing successful Christian presence from a Christian perspective in those two categories of Japanized Christianity and Christianized Japan is indeed helpful, especially when one wants to know about the impact and influence of Christianity in

Japan for the sake of scientific research. Yet, they become obstacles from a pastoral point of view, for they abstract actual Christians living in Japan, making them a collective mass and blurring the faces of people before whom pastors preach. Furthermore, these concepts do not help Japanese Christians, because they only offer false illusions of success which can never be obtained in this world of the penultimate reality.<sup>23</sup> While a powerful Christian speech exemplified by Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington D.C. in 1963 could also happen in Japan, Japan is a non-Christian nation and will most likely remain so in future. In other words, talking about an utopian Christian presence in Japan fueled by the abstraction resulting from a false application of missiological concepts does not help Christians who currently live in Japan with struggles and challenges. Instead, Japanese Christians both lay and clerical need to pay attention to the question of letting Christians Christian in the Japanese context, shifting focus upon actual Christian people in Japan, because there really is neither Japanized Christianity nor Christianized Japan but only Christian “persons” living there with flesh and blood in their concrete context.

## **4.2. Preaching through a Printed Medium: Ayako Miura's *Shiokari Pass* and Shusaku Endo's *Silence***

Ayako Miura and Shusaku Endo are perhaps the most popular Christian novelists in Japan. They were both lay Christians—Miura a Protestant and Endo a Catholic. They wrote about Christian faith as the main theme of their works, focusing often on struggles which Christians have in the Japanese context.

*Shiokari Pass* and *Silence* are fictions based on and inspired by

true stories.<sup>24</sup> *Shiokari Pass* is the name of a steep pass in Hokkaido where a train accident happened in the early 1900s. The last car was by accident detached from the rest of the train at the pass, becoming out of control. Yet, one Christian man threw himself under the car to brake it and saved the lives of the people. Miura took up this story and made it into a novel.

Endo's work is a fictitious reconstruction of an Italian Catholic priest who sneaked into Japan during its national seclusion era in the 17th century. In the novel, Endo depicts the conversion of a priest who ended up renouncing Christ by stepping on *Fumie*, a plate on which a crucifixion was engraved used to detect hidden Christians. It is a conversion in two ways. On the one hand, the priest was forced to abandon his Christian faith, told that he could stop the torture of Japanese Christians who suffered severe physical persecution because the priest refused the renunciation of faith. On the other hand, the priest who had seen Christ beautiful and understood faith as his confessional commitment and clinging to this Christ met Christ through renunciation. He encountered a miserable Christ who came to be rejected by people including the priest and yet captured him and others inescapable, thus being shown the passive nature of faith and therefore relationship to God.

In this novel, Endo illustrates a theologian of the cross, a struggling Christian with flesh and blood instead of an abstract theology.<sup>25</sup> Both are bestselling novels, although the latter has been controversial, for some—if not many—Christians see the renunciation of faith by the priest as nothing but a defeat of Christianity.

#### **4.3.Helping Japanese Christians to Be**

# Christians in Japan

The two novels exemplify different ways which pastors could preach. *Shiokari Pass* follows the hagiographic tradition of edification by offering a role model of faith; *Silence* however shatters such an attempt and offers instead a different picture of faith and Christian living by depicting a theologian of the cross. Both approaches are perhaps appropriate when they are used in a right time and context. Yet, the question is which serves as a better preaching model in the Japanese context today.

I have identified two aspects of the Japanese context: its ethics shaped by a non-Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition and the problem of legalism among Christians. The first point involves two further questions: 1) such an ethics can be trusted and 2) what that really means in practice. These two questions are closely linked to each other, for what is being asked here is the relation between the penultimate and the ultimate realities.

The present world is the penultimate world; yet, how much Christian is that expected to be? Do we expect our society to be authentically Christian? Do we expect Japan to be so as well? Is it possible? The answer is: most likely not. Yet, does the Japanese society in any way have to be Christian? The answer is also: not at all. It is necessary to be realistic especially in the framework of the penultimate reality. The Japanese society is not an actualization of a Christian eschaton. Rather, it is, from a Christian perspective, pagan and will remain so in future, too. Then, the question needs to be addressed is whether the Japanese society reasonably functions in accordance with the values and principles of the modern democracy? To put it differently, is the legal system of the Japanese society working? Is a human law reasonably justly governing the society there? Can Japan as a nation and its democracy be trusted?26

While it is by no means perfect, we can accept that Japan and its democracy under its legal system are working okay. Japan should indeed seek and strive for a better society, but as a society where Christians live the current situation should suffice. Christians should not be overly concerned with its origin as long as the system is reasonably functioning, for whether it is a western society or a non-western society what governs the society in the penultimate world is a human law.

The next question is how Christians can and should live in this society where a human law governs. As it has been made clear, there exists legalism both outside and inside Christianity; not only does the society impose upon Christians a legalism generated from their understanding of what Christians should be but also a strong legalism exists within the church. The answer to the question is found in the thesis of Luther's *On the Freedom of a Christian*: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>27</sup> So, the task of preaching is to enable Christians to live this paradoxical Christian identity: a freed person wrestling in her assigned context in a legalistic penultimate world in order to serve her tangible, concrete—not abstract—neighbors.

The service to the neighbors should involve active participation in politics. Participation in politics should not be confused with any imposition of Christian values and principles on the society by a radical means; rather, it means a life of a citizen responsible to where he is called in service to his neighbors and thus attempts should be made in accordance with the society's legal framework, although there may be an exception.

This may appear nothing different from what Japanese Christians are currently practicing, but the significant difference is that they are free from the legalism resulting from a falsely imposed

Christian ideology. Christians should not care what others—those Christians and non-Christians who do not know who Christians truly are and what the Word of God does to its hearers—think about them, but they should rather boldly engage themselves with a wide range of issues in the society as long as they do so in the spirit of servanthood.

## 5. Conclusion

This is a proposal resulting from my own pastoral experience and study. It is a reflection on what I have found to be the major obstacles for Japanese Christians and a potential solution through the means of preaching. The aim of preaching is not to create Christianized Japan or Japanized Christianity; rather, it is to help Christians to live out their already-given identity as Christians, in struggles found in the tangible, concrete context of encountering and serving their neighbors from God.

### **References:**

1 PEGIDA stands for the Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization of the Occident (in German, Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes).

2 Inazoh Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, the author's edition revised and enlarged, 13th ed. (A Public Domain Book, 1908). Nitobe was a Quaker, married to a Quaker woman from Pennsylvania. Therefore, the book aims to explain to his wife and other westerners what Bushido is; Nitobe does this from a Christian perspective.

3 There are two most famous books on the topic of Bushido. The first is *Hagakure* by Jyōchō Yamamoto and Turamoto Tashiro, published in the early 18th century. *Hagakure* is a dictation of

a Samurai who lived in the period before the Edo era, but when it was written down it was already a century into the Edo era. The second is Nitobe's work.

4 Dr. David Grafton in our casual conversation pointed out that the word and concept of "Judeo-Christian" is already strongly Christian. It is used mainly by Christians to affirm and approve a non-Christian tradition. When I used to term "Judeo-Christian-Islamic," I intend to include this aspect with a sense of irony and arrogance.

5 Inazoh Nitobe, *Bushido*, Preface. "Old Testament" should imply a special revelation. Yet, it is not clear here whether Nitobe meant by the term more than an affirmation of God as the creator of the Japanese people/s and thus natural revelation.

6 Inazoh Nitobe, *Bushido*. The first two chapters of the book explore this issue of eclecticism.

7 The two major principles of the Meiji Restoration were the restoration of the imperial rule and theocracy. Cf. Tetsuya Ohama, "Shintōkokkyōseisaku," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 704.

8 Nario Matsukawa, "Kyōikuchokugo," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 377; Akio Doi, "Kyōiku-to Shūkyō-no Shōtotsu," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 377.

9 Akio Doi, "Sankyō Kaidou," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 589.

10 Akio Doi, "Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 1044-45.

11 In the initial stage, with the understanding that Shinto was the only religion Buddhism lost its status as a religion and the Buddhist clergy were deprived of their privileges, although their status was soon restored. For Buddhism in the Meiji era and its adaptation and transformation, see, James E. Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

12 Yoshiaki Iisaka, "Shinkyō-no Jiyuu," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 696.

13 Nario Matsukawa, "Kyōikuchokugo," 377; Akio Doi, "Kyōiku-to Shūkyō-no Shōtotsu," 377.

14 This is actually a complicated problem, for a similar problem applies to Buddhism whose function in the society had been cultural and ritualistic. It is difficult to say whether this kind of attitude of many Japanese people toward religion today is really new or resembles that in the Edo era before the Meiji Restoration.

15 Yoshiaki Iisaka, "Shinkyō-no Jiyuu," 696.

16 Yoshiaki Iisaka, "Seikyō Bunri," *Nihon Kirisutokyō Rekishi Daijiten*, ed. by Arimichi Ebisawa (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 743-44.

17 She was the first keynote speaker of The Reformed Communion's 2015 Conference "Cultivate: Pastors" in Philadelphia, PA, between September 29 and October 1, 2015.

18 Luther, "28. Eight Sermons at Wittenberg (1522)," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. by Timothy F. Lull and William Russell, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 292.

19 Ibid., 293.

20 Ibid.

21 It is interesting to note that this mentality of planting a Christian society and measuring its success/failure based on some form of tangibility has been present since the time of visitations in the sixteenth-century Germany. See, Gerard Strauss, "XI Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Enacting the Reformation in Germany: Essays on Institution and Reception* (Hampshire, GB: Variorum, 1993), 30-63.

22 Mark Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movement* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

23 I am borrowing Bonhoeffer's concepts of ultimate and penultimate in his *Ethics*.

24 Ayako Miura, *Shiokari Touge* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1972); Shusaku Endo, *Chinmoku* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1972).

25 Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

26 A series of questions here reflect Luther's understanding that a ruler in this world does not have to be Christian. See p. 55-56 in Carter Lindberg's essay, "'Christianization' and Luther on the Early Profit Economy" (*The Reformation as Christianization: Essays on Scott Hendrix's Christianization Thesis*, ed. by Anna Marie Johnson and John A. Maxfield (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012)).

27 LW 31.343.

[PreachingtheWordofGod\\_Rev \(PDF\)](#)

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# The Spirit-given Challenge of the Double-Life

Keynote Address for the Sixth International Crossings Conference  
at Belleville, Illinois, on 25 January 2016  
by Jerome Burce

## I. Gospel

First: my own word of warm welcome to this Sixth International Conference of the Crossings Community, where we'll continue an exploration that began in 2007, at our first conference, when the topic was the Gospel itself—Honest-to-God Gospel, as we billed it that year. Honest-to-God as opposed to dishonest-to-God. Gospel so good, so strong so fresh—good news so deeply anchored in the apostolic witness to the impossible astonishment of God Almighty draped for our sake today in the crucified flesh of Jesus of Nazareth—that even the silliest of sinners, yours truly, for example, is suddenly free to laugh at himself, or to deplore himself, and even so to trust this God with a glad and cheerful heart in life and in death; and yes, he does this now without pretense—without succumbing, that is, to the sinner's standard folly of hanging one's hopes on the supposition, both arrogant and baseless, that God is really not so good and fierce and righteous and demanding as God claims to be. "He's sure to let me slide," the stupid sinner keeps saying, "if indeed he's even there to worry about at all."

Honest-to-God Gospel is the death of such drivel, thank God, who

replaces the compulsion to spout it with the joy some shepherds celebrated one night in Bethlehem as they headed back to their fields, no longer fretting as they long had over the fact that they stank to high heaven the way shepherds are wont to do. Once there, of course, they knuckled down to the rest of the night's work and tended their smelly sheep, this being the first and best of ways to keep glorifying and praising God for the sweet aroma of that baby in the manger they had just been drenched in. Above them the skies still echoed absurdly with the sound of God's delight in them, and in us all— or so we dared in Christ to assume this past Christmas Eve.

## **II. Explorations Thus Far**

I hope you'll pardon me for the length and thickness of this opening salvo. For those of you new to Crossings, it's essential that I underscore what this little band of misfits is all about. Our passion is the Gospel, nothing less, nothing other. Our mission—self-appointed, some might say—is to think about the Gospel, and argue for the Gospel in the life of the Church, for the sake of the world, and especially for the consolation and encouragement of down-to-earth Christian people as they go about their days. That's why, among much else, we organize these conferences, inviting old friends and new ones alike to share our joy, and even better to increase it as they bring their gifts of faith and thought to bear on the conversation. Thank God for them; thank God tonight for each of you.

So looking back, in 2008 we explored the importance, for the sake of God's Gospel and the people it's meant for, of maintaining a sharp distinction between it and God's Law, that other great Word with its own set of tasks. Here, of course, we followed Luther and his colleagues, who all too rarely get the hearing they deserve these days.

In 2010 we tracked the implications of this Law/Gospel distinction for the mission of the Church. We did the same in 2012 around the hot-button topic of Christian discipleship. Two years ago, in 2014, we discussed the pluralistic assumptions of contemporary Western culture, and the challenges these pose both to the church's mission and to our calling as baptized people to keep trusting our Lord Jesus Christ day after day, this being what discipleship is finally all about.

I mention in passing that the key presentations at all these conferences are available on the Crossings website. Most all of them are well worth your time, and many offer insights that you won't find elsewhere. I encourage you to check them out, or to read them again, as the case may be.

### **III. The Topic This Year**

Meanwhile, and all too suddenly, it's 2016. Again we come together with God's Gospel as our focus and our passion, and again we aim to build on work we've done already. Again our playground, so to speak—the factory floor, if you prefer things serious—is a conundrum, one that the Gospel itself creates; and the overriding question for our work together between now and Wednesday noon is how to use the Gospel to address the very mess it thrusts us into every day of our lives.

Here's the conundrum: where anything properly called Christian is concerned, there isn't one, there are two. Not that all Christians recognize this, but we-all are Lutheran Christians, and so we do, this being the best gift we can offer to the conversation of the wider church.

So, for example, there isn't one creation we're all enmeshed in, there are two creations, the second launched on Easter Sunday, "when it was still dark," as St. John says in the first verse of

chapter 20, where the allusion to Genesis 1 is beyond reasonable dispute.

There isn't one Word from God that defines, launches, shapes, and governs these two creations and requires our attention, there are two such Words from God, each asserting and exercising its distinct jurisdiction, each running its own kingdom to use the older language that no one understands anymore. In any case, here is Law. There is Gospel, as many of us heard again last night, from Marcus Felde—two words, not one.

Because of that there isn't one way of being righteous, there are two ways of being righteous. So says Paul in Romans 3, and he says it emphatically, with a big fat “but” interposed between the two—in Greek, *alla*—so that we see each as an alternative to the other, not a supplement, an add-on for the other, as people keep wanting even so to treat them—thank you, John Calvin.

Again, there isn't one birth, but two births, not one me, one you, but two me's, two you's. I assume that Dr. Turnbull—Steve, as he'll want us to call him—will lay this out for us tomorrow, as he walks us through the consternation of Nicodemus, the first person in an endless stream of people who have found this idea befuddling, John 3.

So also in first-century Corinth there isn't one church to describe, but two churches, the one a rowdy pack of confused and quarrelsome people, the other a sacrosanct temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3. That this applies to churches today is something we'll also hear about tomorrow, or so I surmise, as we welcome first Dr. Schiffrin and then Pastor Takamura to the podium.

And no, we're not done with this: because, as we saw in 2010, God charges baptized people not with one mission, but two missions; and when they get up in the morning and make the sign of the cross, they're reminded that their multiple callings—the

fancy word here is “vocation”—are not of one sort, but two sorts, the first immediately and often sharply defined by the agents of God you’re working for—your boss, your spouse, your kids, your customers, the clown ahead of you on the freeway who keeps tapping his brakes in the blithe expectation that you’re paying attention and won’t rear-end him. Alongside that is vocation of the other sort, this one defined ever so vaguely by the Son of God when he tells you to let the light of your confidence in Him shine brightly, so that others, seeing its consequences, will get excited about God too. But whatever does this mean in practice today—when in fact you’re out there on the freeway, for example, or up to your eyeballs in the demands and duties of the several jobs you wake up to every morning? Drs. Braaten and Baumgaertner will help us think about this vocational juggling act beginning tomorrow evening, spilling into Wednesday; and also on Wednesday—whatever you do, do not miss Wednesday—we’ll think more closely about how to keep the act going when the rules of the turf you’re juggling on make it plain that excitement about God of any kind isn’t wanted here at all. Dr. Saler in particular will be our mentor when we get to that point.

## **IV. The Need for Conversation**

Now let me suggest that all these speakers are going to be exploring the phenomenon that St. Paul will touch on in this coming Sunday’s second lesson, Revised Common Lectionary: “Now we see, as in a copper mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Or consider the photo that appeared last month in *The New York Times*, of a man all but lost in the brutal smog that had settled stubbornly on Beijing for a stretch of days. This strikes me too as a useful metaphor for the problem we’re all here to think and talk about these next many hours.

I underscore the “all” in that last sentence. Yes, the caliber of the people we get to hear from is such that I, for one, would be more than happy to sit here mute tomorrow, merely soaking in the verbal bath of whatever they’ll happen to gush with. Yet such is the problem, so grimy the smog, so tarnished the mirror, that soaking doesn’t do these days. It never has. We need to scrub, each of us, God’s two-edged Word serving as cleanser, and some back-and-forth conversation as the brush. The aim is for each of us to go home with a hard-earned thought or two as a gift for the people the Holy Spirit insists on sending us to. They’re busy scrubbing as well, though often badly. Instead of polishing the mirror, they scratch it. Instead of thinning the haze, they thicken it. For their sake, please plan on asking, talking, poking, prodding, until you’ve grabbed hold of that useful thought—the sudden insight, perhaps— anchored in Christ crucified and nothing less, that you can pass along with confidence. And while you’re at it, let the confidence include the bold thought that what you got here, you got from God. If others find that arrogant and unseemly, so be it.

Remember, after all, that St. Paul spent an entire apostolic career impressing others as arrogant and unseemly. That’s what happens when you’re so gripped in the Gospel that you run around insisting on all this infernal two-ness that characterizes our Christian experience; though if Paul himself were here and into English word play, he’d insist, I’m sure, that we call it a *supernal* two-ness. It’s not, after all, as if he made it up, or got it from the devil; though lots of folks along the way have thought so.

Paul *spent* a career. Pay attention to the verb here. It’s about to anchor one side of another two-ness that far too few of us baptized types have thought to pay attention to, even those of us in Lutheran dress. Or so I’m going to argue; and in that argument will be the main contribution I hope to make this very

evening to the conversation we'll all be having.

## **V. The Holy Spirit, Poorly Discerned**

But first, back we step to dim mirrors and thick smogs.

As most of you know, Paul's comment about the mirror is a piece of his counsel to a congregation that's choking with dismay over a host of arguments. The one he's speaking to directly in chapter 13 has to do with the Holy Spirit, understood as the immediate presence and power of God, a power that enables a person or persons to do things that otherwise cannot be done.

I repeat this: "Holy Spirit" equals "the immediate presence and power of God enabling a person or persons to do things that otherwise cannot be done." I toss this out for our purposes here as an initial working definition. Had I the time, I'd go into it at length, but I don't, so I won't. We can talk about it later if you'd like.

In any case, the question at Corinth: who has the Spirit, and who does not? Of the haves, who has more, who has less, and how do you assess this? And finally, what about the deadbeat "have-nots"? Once you've figured out who they are, how do you deal with them?

Really, has there ever been a moment in the life of the Church when this argument wasn't raging—somewhere, in some form? Since I don't imagine that my own baptized lifetime is a weird aberration from every other Christian lifetime, my answer is no. Who has the Spirit? Or to cloak the question in other terms, who's the real Christian, the serious Christian, the better, the wiser, the more faithful Christian, the true believer, the orthodox believer, the ortho-practical believer whose Spirit-given faith is proved in Spirit-given works—she gives a hand for the poor, you see, as those other deadbeats do not. Unlike them,

she digs for root causes.

“We take the Bible seriously as the infallible, Spirit-breathed Word of God—you rascals don’t.” This too is a form of the Corinthian argument. When I was a first-year student at Concordia Seminary across the river, it tore my school apart. As for its several eruptions in the brief history of the ELCA, I’d rather not go there this evening—again, time forbids it, and for that my stomach is really quite grateful; though let me point out even so how each and every wrangle of the past 28 years has been punctuated—in some cases dominated—by loud and strident talk of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, who either encourages representational quotas or abhors them, who either sees suddenly fit to authorize gay marriage or continues as ever to empower gay celibacy, not that he/she/it has ever made like the hand at Belshazzar’s feast, inscribing his/her/its definitive opinion *for right now* on the screens at a churchwide assembly; though even then we’d haggle about it. We’d do that in part because it’s so, so hard to trust each other, especially when it comes to matters of “the Spirit.” “Which spirit is at work here?” we have to ask. We ask it because we all sense how the spirits at work in the world are legion, and how all but the One are *un-*holy, some vividly so; and how every sinner’s mind and heart is riddled with them.

So the quarrels go on, and the factions multiply. Welcome to the history of the church—most all of which, by the way, will strike most baptized folk as more or less irrelevant as they step into their days. Their question, if they even think to ask it any more, is whether this Spirit they hear about—this presence and power of God enabling *them* to do what can’t be done—has any role to play at all in their daily routines. Most, I’m guessing, are guessing not.

## VI. God's Power in Two Forms (Type E, Type X)

Though even as I say this, I need to clarify, or, as we Lutherans keep saying, to distinguish; to spot another two-ness in the ways of God with humankind, and point it out. Are people in the pews clamoring for signs of the power of God at work in their lives? Of course they are; though what they ache for—some so urgently that they'll muster cohorts of prayer warriors to beg for it—is a specific form of God's power, the one that works *on* me as *object*, and does so *especially* in the details of everyday life. So, for example, it kills the cancer. It averts the car wreck. It lands the promotion. It punches the numbers for the winning lottery ticket if I'm crass enough to play the lottery. Perhaps it breaks my addiction to playing the numbers. For purposes here, let's call this Power, Type E, where "E" stands for "everyday."

Now this is *not* the power that the rubric "Holy Spirit" covers—or so I suggest, and with all my heart I invite you to test this with me later. Spirit-power works, not *on* me as object, but *through* me as agent. Again, it enables me to do what otherwise I could not do, with others as the beneficiaries of the doing that gets done. So in Luke's Gospel, for example, it empowers me to bear a child in my virginity, or to sing a Nunc Dimittis in my senescence, or to scatter nasty spirits, or to look you in the eye and forgive your sins with a straight face. It even stoops so low and small as to twist my criminal head in Jesus' direction and give me just enough breath to croak out, "Lord, remember me..."—and this, mind you, to the future comfort and edification of millions upon millions of other criminal sinners, the present assembly included.

Which brings us, of course, to the main point, the most important one of all: Spirit- power is inextricably intertwined

in the apostolic witness with God's great doing for us all in Jesus Christ. So to keep *this* clear, and again for present purposes, let's call this God's Power Type X, where X signifies Christ and the cross we killed him on.

Type X power is *not* the power that the Lutheran people I know best are hankering and pining for right now as their days dribble by, at least not that I can tell. It's not the power they're praying for as they head to work or school on Monday morning, if indeed they're praying at all. You lay folk should know that there's not a preacher in this room who won't blanch when she confronts the text we're given to read this coming summer, 10th Sunday after Pentecost, Luke 11: "If," says Jesus, "you...who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit"—implication: *the* best gift ever—"to those who ask him!" Well, sure; and even now I see it, all those eyes staring blankly at me as people wonder how they could even start to want what Jesus touts here; and really, it's my job as preacher to get them thirsting for it? *Kyrie eleison*—or so I mutter as I plan a quick vacation and line up the sub.

All of which is simply to observe that we Lutherans are strangely lousy on this topic of the Spirit. To use a term that will surface again and again in our time together, we struggle to *discern* it. That's assuming, again, that we even to think to look for it; though when we do, as in seminaries or grave assemblies, how quick we are to rip ourselves to shreds, Corinthian style. People tend to do that when they're stumbling through a haze of thick confusion. Ergo this conference.

## **VII. Discerning the Spirit: The Essential**

## *Satis Est*

Strangely lousy, I say; weirdly confused. Of all Christians, Lutherans have the least excuse to be murky and confused about the Holy Spirit, aka, God's Power Type X. After all, we've got St. Paul in our corner, don't we? And with him, of course, comes Luther, Melanchthon tagging along.

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We have some seminarians with us. Have you heard yet about the *satis est*? That's the label for one of the great assertions of the Augsburg Confession, so often ignored, also by Lutherans. Article VII: "It is enough—in Latin *satis est*—for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

Behind this, I submit, lies the original *satis est*, the one we got to hear this past Sunday as Paul took up the Spirit-specific questions that were seething at Corinth.

"No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." That, says Paul, is the baseline test for God's Type X power, present and in action.

Really? But it sounds so simple, so trifling, so unworthy of divine majesty, so easy to do: three little words, anyone can say them, can't they? Answer: no, they can't. My old teacher, Ed Schroeder, has a great story about this. He got it from his colleague, Robert Bertram, the co-founder with him of this little Crossings outfit. Perhaps he'll tell it later, or if not, go ask him. Or even better, you can run your own test on the way home. Walk around the rest stop or the airport lounge, and ask everyone you meet to say it: "Jesus is Lord." Guess what: it will not happen, and I will cheerfully lay a bet on that. A big bet. Not that I have to. Even now you're all cringing as all

Lutherans always do at the thought of even trying such a thing.

Still, among our own it sounds so easy, too easy: "Jesus is Lord." No, we say to each other, it isn't enough, *satis non est*. There has got to be more, so much, much more, to this faith and life that God the Holy Spirit uses Type X power to generate; and before you know it we've invented more, we've piled it on. Jesus-is-Lord plus. Plus Easter celebrated according to the correct calendar—that was way back when. Plus ministry organized in the right, the proper manner—a huge thing that's been for Lutherans in America. Jesus-is-Lord plus all doctrines correctly parsed and sufficiently choked down, Jesus-is-Lord plus all proper behavior that properly reflects a sanctified life, as we like to put it, and now let's go to war over which behaviors these are. Can you drink a glass of beer or not? Can a Christian vote Republican—or is that Democrat?

All of which reflects a couple of huge and stupid mistakes that all Christians should be mightily ashamed of, though Lutherans in particular.

Mistake number one: the moment I add "plus" to "Jesus-is-Lord" I've invented an oxymoron, insulting Jesus in the process. Jesus is *not* Lord if a simple confidence in him is not enough to be get us counted among the saints. At best he's Lord-lite, sharing his throne with whatever else we've ginned up and added on to anchor and define our Christian identity. That includes, by the way, those extra things we dig up from the Bible. Circumcision, say. Never getting a divorce, an add-on that some people here are old enough to remember vividly.

Mistake number two: to add a plus of any kind to "Jesus is Lord" is to show how clueless I am about the very thing I've just confessed. "All things are yours, whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, life, death, the present, the future, all are yours, and you are

Christ's, and Christ is God's." That's Paul in chapter 3 of 1st Corinthians spelling out what the Lordship of Jesus signifies for those folks at a point when they're still behaving very badly. Or again to the Ephesians, chapter 2: "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—made us, raised us, seated us, past tense, done deal. Or now Peter chiming in, 1st letter, chapter 2: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, proclaiming the mighty acts of him who called you of darkness," this as opposed to ginning up of heap of extras to prove that you belong.

Yes, and all this is wrapped up and encompassed in that tawdry little three word package, Jesus is Lord—but then we're Lutherans, aren't we? And isn't Luther the thinker who, more than any other, has followed Paul in recognizing how God delights in hiding his best stuff in the least appealing places—a manger, yes, encircled by stinking shepherds; or far, far worse, that awful, terrible cross, surrounded by sinners? And to that there's something I can add, or you?

But to spot this stuff; to credit this stuff, to sing with joy on its account; to turn around and use this stuff—that takes power, incredible power, God's power Type X, the first and greatest gift that the Holy Spirit gives. Without it, we are sunk.

## **VIII. Every Person's Essential First Question**

We are sunk because the power of God, Type E, the kind that people hanker for, is deadly. It stings, as Paul will say, 1st Corinthians 15. Even so it's familiar; and until we're stung, we

tend to like it. We like it so well that we'll even prefer it to the new kind, Type X. Jesus points this out himself in Luke's version of the wineskin parable. "No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'" That's in Luke 5, and only Luke 5. The Pharisees Luke talks about were deeply hooked on the taste of old wine. So are lots of Lutherans.

Quickly, let's recall. God's power Type E works *on* us, as *objects*. God gives. We get. God gives not. We get not. Were this the only thing to talk about this evening, we'd observe how this Power Type E is the engine that drives the world as we know it.

Thinking on, we might explore the oddity of people's expectations of Type E power: how they imagine, for example, that God being good is bound to give us stuff that we call good, forgetting that what's good for God is often really, really bad for the sinners that God in his goodness is trying to control.

Or we might talk at greater length about the way God's exercise of Type E power leads always, and without fail, to a great, irreparable dispute between God and every sinner, sinners concluding that God has done them dirty, God for God's part refusing to put up with that nonsense. Some of you spent much of today exploring the Crossings method of unpacking a Biblical text. The one side, the diagnostic—that's where God's Type E power is at issue and in play, top to bottom.

Enter Christ Jesus, the Son of God, born of Mary, and now let's see how Type E power comes crashing down on him. For our sake, for our salvation, "God made him to be sin who knew no sin"—yet again St. Paul, still trying, trying, trying in chapter 5 of the Second Letter to wean the Corinthians off their fundamental folly, their absurd, insane addiction to a core precept of Type E power-in-operation: to get you've got to earn. To be right you've got to do right. And if something looks shabby, an

apostle, for example—one Paul in particular, in case anyone is wondering—it probably is shabby, not blessed by God, as some at Corinth seem to be suggesting.

But isn't that how the world still works, the world we see that is? In this world I'm under the gun to be as righteous as can be, as good as I can manage; and this, that's true of me, is true of you as well, and of every other human being, be they baptized or not. It's true of the communities we form and the institutions we organize and run, including ones with labels like ELCA or NALC or Wartburg Seminary or Messiah Lutheran Church. I can't recall a day going by when I haven't had to ask the question: what must I/we do today. Those better organized than me, my wife, for example, make little lists that they carefully work through. What must we do to finish our work, to care for our families, to serve our customers, to keep sticky fingers out of the till, or, in my daily digs, bad guys from hurting little children at our school. What must we do to be better, more deserving, a tad more righteous? What must I do to keep, God forbid, from wasting this day—which, if I do, I'll hear about, God channeling his opinion, for sure, through someone else. The frowning boss. The weary spouse. That teacher, appointed by God, to mark my test with a C-. Or an A+, in which case I beam, don't I. Look, I say, the mark of a righteous student—and isn't that the aim, to come out righteous? Not, of course, that I'm altogether there yet, or anywhere close, for that matter.

But so long as I'm not there yet, the question persists. I cannot *stop* asking it. "What must I do?"

## **IX. The Baptized Person's Second**

## Question—Greater, Unsettling

Comes the dilemma, and with it a challenge.

Even as I live this life, the one my mother pushed me into, I live another life, the one that God the Holy Spirit either pushed or drowned me into, depending on which baptismal metaphor you want to play with.

This other life is Christ-life—or to stick more closely to Paul, life *in* Christ.

In this other life “What must I do” is a stupid question. It doesn’t belong. It makes no sense. Remember, in Christ-life “all things are yours.” A parenthetical question to talk about later: why wasn’t this drummed into us when we were little baptized children? Why in my own case did it startle me so when I stumbled across it at age 28? Yet here it was, and is, and always will be, God’s Gospel—nothing less, that is, than the Holy Spirit’s declaration of present reality, anchored in Christ: *all things are yours*.

This being so, what *must* you do? The only sensible answer: “Nothing at all.” Think about it. You wake up one morning with a billion dollars in your bank account, dropped there, no strings attached, by a mad and wondrous donor. What *must* you do? Answer: “Nothing at all.” Addendum to that answer: “Stop babbling. Start exulting instead in the only questions that your new and sudden circumstance begs you to ask: “How *might* I spend this day?’ ‘How *might* I use the treasure I get to wallow in the whole day through?’”

It occurs me to that most of us—working stiff that we are, obsessed day in and day out with all those things we don’t have yet and have got somehow to obtain—would have a tough and terrible time adjusting to this new circumstance. Suddenly gone

are all those spiky, pressing obligations that shape and order our schedules. It's one thing to take a week's vacation, though even then there are things I've got to do. It's quite another to be on permanent vacation for the rest of my life, with not a care in the world, at least where I'm concerned. Would I not go crazy?

Welcome, then, to Type X-powered reality. In my seminary days a professor made some of us bog our way through a poor translation of Werner Elert's *The Christian Ethos*. It was thick and dense and magisterial—and ever so marvelous. With all my heart I recommend it to seminarians here if you're lucky enough to find a copy.

There were in that book a few lines that burned tracks in my brain. Here's one of them: "The person who has experienced liberation from nomological existence floats in empty space where he feels giddy." I kid you not, that's what it said—again, "The person who has experienced liberation from nomological existence floats in empty space where he feels giddy." Yes, that's bad translation from tough theological German, but still, the point comes through. Life in the Spirit, Type X powered life, is weird. The rules are gone. At first it's dim; it's murky; I'm not sure what to do. No doing is required, and I seriously dislike the feeling this creates. It's like stumbling through a haze.

And I dislike it all the more when I find myself stuck simultaneously in the old life, Type E powered, where the rules abound and I'm forced to earn my keep.

It's precisely here that the two-ness we've been speaking of gets unpleasant, and living with it becomes like walking through that Beijing smog. And I'm not at all surprised that Paul, the apostle of two-ness, continues to get the rough treatment he got

in those churches he founded way back when.

How does a person or, even harder, a church of persons carry on in two God-given systems that ask us to operate on contrary assumptions? In the one, righteousness of a sort is the goal you're aiming at. In the other, righteousness of another astonishing sort is your jumping off point. In the one, rules are of the essence. In the other, rules are absurd. In the one you're a work in progress with heaps of work that has got to be done. In the other you're a finished product who is free to play the whole day long, and in the joy of that play, to spread the riches around.

Paul's point to his churches, especially at Corinth and Philippi, is that the second system takes precedence. It's the one that baptized people are called to pay attention to first and foremost, and to trust, and to practice, above all in their dealings with each other. To read his letters is to see how hard he has to work to make the point.

The challenge at this conference is to listen to Paul, or rather, to the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul, and to practice what the Spirit preaches.

I, for one, don't see the churches I know doing that very much at all. That too is something we can talk about later, if you'd like.

## **X. Two Lives to Lead, Two Questions to Ask. Simultaneously.**

As for now, I wind things up by tossing out my own chief contribution to the conversation we're going to have.

Baptized people, at once saddled and blessed with two lives overlapping, two forms of God's power working either on them or

through them, have two questions to ask. Not one, but two.

Question 1. What must I do/you do/we do. What must they do? Can we dodge this question? No. Does baptism relieve us of the imperative to ask it? Again, no. It's of the essence in the life we were *born* to live, and sooner or later to lose. It drags in its wake a couple of other questions: a) How do I get what I need/want, assuming I don't have it yet, and, once I think I have it, then b) how do I *keep* it.

Question 2 is a different creature altogether. It starts with an altogether different assumption, intrinsic to this second life-in-Christ that we were *baptized* to live. So it doesn't ask, "How do I get, how do I keep," but, to the contrary, "How can I spend?" How can I spend what I have already in such absurd, profuse abundance? How can we spend it together with joy and abandon? What holy prodigality shall we indulge in today to our Lord's beaming delight?

Or to clean that up and sharpen it some more, let me draw on our tradition, specifically Lutheran. Let this second question be, "How might we use Christ and his benefits—so great they are, so abounding, so utterly inexhaustible? How shall we use them in each and every circumstance we find ourselves in, whether as fellow saints living and working and trusting together, or as the secret agents of new creation we become when God, exercising Type E power, wakes us up in the morning and shoves us out the door and into our daily routines?"

Christ and his benefits: how might we use them, how shall we spend them? (Not "must," but "shall.") We ask this question as an essential way of confessing that Jesus is our Lord. That's why it's also the focus of the second, prognostic leg of that Crossings method that some of you dug into today.

Of these two questions, 1) what must we do to get and keep, 2)

how might we use Christ and spend his benefits, the second is by far the greater and more pressing. So says the Holy Spirit. How is it, then, that I've never heard it come up explicitly on the floor of a synod assembly, or be raised as a topic for a congregational Bible study? It's the first, the what-to-do question, that gets all the attention. But that too is something to chew on later if anyone is so inclined.

## **XI. Spending Tips**

For now I draw to things to a close with a few semi-random thoughts about using Christ and his benefits. Each of them is cursory in the extreme, nothing more than the précis of an essay that hasn't been written yet and couldn't be delivered here in any case. I pass them along even so to incite your own better and deeper thinking:

1. On using Christ: again, it's murky, a dim seeing in the poor mirror. So it calls for imagination and a dollop of nerve, of the kind the Holy Spirit gives. Hardly ever, if at all, is there only one, correct way to go about it. Remember that when the Master buzzes off and doles out the talents to the slaves, he doesn't tell them how to use them, only *that* they use them; and the only thing that can land you in hot water with the Master is not using them at all, because you were afraid, or too damn lazy with a laziness that does damn because it blows Christ off and leaves us on our own to deal with God in Type E mode. This Sunday Paul will equate "using the Master's talents" with the word "love." As far as I know, that word doesn't come with an instruction manual.
2. We use Christ and his benefits when, like the shepherds, we return to the stink of our daily routines without fretting that the stink will stick to our clothes and hair and whatever, causing God to wrinkle God's nose at us all

over again. The first and greatest gift of Christ is the promise that God is past wrinkling God's nose where you and I are concerned. Still less will God do this when we sit with sinners as Christ keeps sitting with us.

3. Back to the "it's murky" department. People using Christ will sometimes make choices and adopt procedures that leave other Christ-users appalled. For example, this from an article that appeared in Valparaiso University's *The Cresset* in 1957, entitled "Legal Morality and the Two Kingdoms: "There is the case of the Nebraska judge who in the morning granted a divorce to a husband and wife and in the evening, at a congregational meeting, had to condemn their divorce and, exercising the office of the keys, had to vote to bar them from the Lord's Supper." Notice, *had to* bar them. The Christ-user who wrote this, by the way, was one Robert W. Bertram in his late 50's version, which I suspect was somewhat different from the Bertram of the late '90s.
4. Christ-users will not blanch at rejoicing when people who don't know Christ behave better than they do. Nor will they flinch from admitting that this can and does happen. Righteousness of the kind that emerges in the old life, Type E powered, has never been an exclusively Christian property, nor is it now. Righteousness of the second kind, Type X powered, frees one to see this, and to honor it as one God's better passing gifts for life in this world.
5. Finally: Christ-users will practice, practice, practice at the great art of seeing Christ and honoring Christ in people they're simultaneously critiquing. That's what the Spirit keeps urging through St. Paul as he writes his letters. "If anyone is in Christ—new creation: look! Notice! The old has passed away, the new has come!" Let's practice looking for this right here, in and with each other, as we move into the rest of our time together.

+ + +

*For discussion around tables, by way of launching our conversation—*

- a. What do you hope to ask and explore in the course of our time together at this conference?
- b. How might you/we apply the benefits of Christ to the problem of Donald Trump?

[HolySpiritDoubleLife \(PDF\)](#)

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# **The Spirit and the Publicly Engaged Church**

Rob Saler

## **What it Looks Like When it Goes Right**

On May 24, 1996, a group of Islamic terrorists announced that they had “slit the throats” of seven French Trappist monks whom they had kidnapped from the monastery of Tibherine in Algeria and held as hostages for two months. Prior to the kidnapping, the superior of the monastery, Father Christian de Chergé, had left with his family this testament “to be opened in the event of my death.”<sup>i</sup>

If it should happen one day—and it could be today—that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to encompass all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, my family, to remember that my life

was given to God and to this country. I ask them to accept that the One Master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to be able to associate such a death with the many other deaths that were just as violent, but forgotten through indifference and anonymity.

My life has no more value than any other. Nor any less value. In any case, it has not the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I share in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world, even in that which would strike me blindly. I should like, when the time comes, to have a clear space which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of all my fellow human beings, and at the same time to forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down.

I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder. It would be to pay too dearly for what will, perhaps, be called "the grace of martyrdom," to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. I know the scorn with which Algerians as a whole can be regarded. I know also the caricature of Islam which a certain kind of Islamism encourages. It is too easy to give oneself a good conscience by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideologies of the extremists. For me, Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough, I believe, in the sure knowledge of what I have received in Algeria, in the respect of believing Muslims—finding there so often that true strand of the Gospel I learned at my mother's knee, my very first Church.

My death, clearly, will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naive or idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of it!" But these people must realize that my most avid curiosity will then be satisfied. This is what I shall be able to do, if God wills—immerse my gaze in that of the Father, to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, delighting in the differences.

For this life given up, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God who seems to have wished it entirely for the sake of that joy in everything and in spite of everything. In this "thank you," which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and their families—the hundredfold granted as was promised!

And you also, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you were doing. Yes, for you also I wish this "thank you"—and this *adieu*—to commend you to the God whose face I see in yours.

And may we find each other, happy "good thieves," in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

A good question for when Christians gather – including we Lutherans who operate in some ways in as much of an ecclesial remove from our Trappist brothers as the Trappists did from the Islamic Aglerian villagers – might be framed as follows: what sort of life must be lived in order to produce such a remarkable document? Which raises the accompanying question: what must it mean for a Christian to have one's life become such a masterwork

of faith?

I should say that, as implied by my framing the question this way, I regard Fr. de Chergé's statement as a near-perfect instance of how the Christian worldview, in genuinely incarnational rhetorical fashion (as Eric Auerbach noticed decades ago), blends the most eschatologically sublime understanding of the beautified vision characteristic of Christian hopes for heaven (theoria in the original sense) with an earthy, humane awareness of human fallibility and epistemological humility. In other words, it is a slam dunk. An act of Christian virtuosity that I would assert is indicative not only of individual charisma, but of successful Christian formation. This is what it looks like when it all goes right, and it is both gratifying and humbling.

If the topic of this talk is a Publicly Engaged Church, then a Trappist monastery in a remote Algerian village might seem a strange place to start. Luther's critique of monasticism, of course, was predicated on what became his disdain for the problematic material AND theological economies which would regard a life of monastic separation from the world as the pinnacle of Christian living.

But the case of the monks of Tibherine, the case is more complex. As depicted movingly in the 2010 film *Of Gods and Men*, which tells the story of the monks, a major reason why they stayed was because the monks' medical training was the only means for the Algerian peasants in the nearby village to receive medical care. The village was their public; that is made clear by the film. What is also made clear by the film, though, is a kind of shadow curriculum regarding the day-to-day activities of the monks. The film is two hours long, but only about 30 minutes of that run time is given over to the plot by which the monks are threatened, decide to stay, and are eventually captured – in

other words, only about 1/4 of the movie is “plot” per se. The rest of the film (in a manner akin to another excellent recent film about monastic life, *Into Great Silence*) is an extended lingering on the part of the camera over the daily lives and routines of the monks – washing dishes, laboring in gardens, praying, writing, etc. In a manner quite different from the standardized (and relatively didactic) tropes by which the average Hollywood film approaches “characterization,” in both films the interplay of monastic anonymity and almost uncomfortable perspectival intimacy allows for viewers to encounter a somewhat disorienting but ultimately rich combination of ritual space and deep humanity.

There is much that could be said about the effect of such lingering, but for our Lutheran purposes, we can return to the tension around monasticism that is our inheritance and broaden the question a bit more: what are the modes by which the Spirit forms us now, in the 21st century, such that we can engage the public and its diversity (including diversity that includes genuine otherness, and indeed otherness that wants to kill us) in ways that are true to the gospel, proper to the Lutheran understanding of the primacy of the spirit’s work in creating holiness, and honoring of the tension between the historical sources that inform us and the contemporary worldviews that shape us in contested but indisputable ways? I want to be clear that when I talk about “honoring diversity,” I do not mean that in a fuzzy, PC way, or even in the butterfly-collecting mode of trumpeting diversity (“some of this, some of that”) that is so easy for our institutions to adopt. I mean instead the raw, gritty, human work of existing in a world of violence in ways that honor the Prince of Peace and the gospel’s hold upon us.

## Beyond the Dichotomy

It is natural that these goals as stated would be framed both in terms of pneumatology and in terms of public church. As the work of Cheryl Peterson and others has shown, it no longer makes any sense to discuss ecclesiology without pneumatology. The two most significant forces within global Christianity – Roman Catholicism and global Pentecostalism – both have diverse construals of the work of the Spirit in shoring up the authority of the church at the heart of their ecclesiologies. In Roman Catholicism, it is precisely pneumatology that undergirds the claim that the magisterium of the Catholic church, while not infallible in most instances, is nonetheless safeguarded from damnable error by the Holy Spirit's preservation of the *ecclesia docens*. And in global Pentecostalism (under whose rubric, from a sociological standpoint, I would even include such ostensibly Lutheran churches as Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia), it is precisely the odd combination of unpredictability and routinization that attends encounters with the Holy Spirit on the part of adherents that forms the uniquely adaptable communities by which Pentecostalism has thrived. Point being, this conference has it exactly right to presume (and assert) that there is no functional ecclesiology that does not at least imply a pneumatology, to the point that it's good to be explicit about the connections every once in a while.

But meanwhile, if in this lecture I'm yielding to the temptation to highlight a literal monastery and its engagement with its surroundings as a model for a public church, then know that I absolutely mean for that image to strike you as odd, and I'll be trading on that oddness for the rest of this talk. I don't mean for us to backtrack from Luther's fundamental insight that the monastic communities of his time had largely become caught up in spiritual and material economies that were theologically tendentious and politically exploitative. Less is it a kind of

apologia for New Monasticism or even the sort of ecclesial sectarianism that one finds in such theological movements as Hauerwasian ethics, MacIntyrean “New Benedict” options, or Radical Orthodoxy (and yes, I’m aware that adherents of all these movements would deny that they are sectarian in precisely that sense, and yes, I am here registering my skepticism about that denial. But that’s a matter for another time).

However, I do want in this talk to revisit the question of ecclesiology and pneumatology from the uniquely Lutheran perspective represented at conferences like this one, and in so doing I want to lay my cards on the table: while it is very, very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that public engagement is some kind of either/or between the church digging into its own unique identity or the church conforming itself to the standards of relevance set by its cultural surroundings. So easy, in fact, that I have often let my own work on ecclesiology and pneumatology fall into this false dichotomy. In my recent book (which was actually finished in 2011, but it came out last year<sup>2</sup>), I traded heavily on a distinction between what I called polis ecclesiology (i.e. the sort of Hauerwasian, MacIntyrean, community-centered model whereby the church is understood as a distinct public with its own authoritative and epistemological structures) and an ecclesiology of the church as diffusively spatialized event whereby the goal of theology and public engagement would be to discern where God’s spirit is engaged in truth-telling within the world.

While I would be happy to have you still buy my book, and while I stand by that description of the dichotomy as one into which most contemporary construals of the relationship between ecclesiology and pneumatology do fall (particularly under the conditions of a divided church in which authority structures among churches remain contested), I will confess to everyone in this august setting that I am now at the point where I am no

longer satisfied with allowing that dichotomy to stand as a normative (rather than a descriptive) account of the Spirit's formation of the church.

And the major reason for my growing discomfort (besides the fact, as my friend and mentor Paul Hinlicky has finally convinced me that it represents a kind of ecumenical dead-end, albeit a newer and more interesting deadlock than the one currently facing the ecumenical movement) is that I think when we tackle what the Lutheran tradition has to say about life in the Spirit and the ecclesiological implications of that formation, then far more interesting possibilities emerge. Those immersed in Lutheran theology ought to be used to the idea that following Luther into the depths of the incarnational logic inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ presents opportunities to overcome rigorous binaries between the life of the church and the life of the world, since after all for Luther the church as God's beloved community is, in Romans 8 style, the harbinger of God's redemption of all creation, all that God has made. Meanwhile, in Luther's radicalization of the Tome of Leo's *communicatio idiomatum* (shown most directly in the shockingly carnal, or rather in-carnal, implications of the third mode of Christ's presence as outlined in the 1528 treatise *Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper*), it becomes clear to us that in this "heavenly mode" of Christ's presence with God, Christ not only transcends creation as God does (think John 1) but is also as deeply embedded in creation as is God's sustaining providence (think Augustine, for whom God is closer to us than we are to ourselves).

## **Loving the World More than It Loves Itself**

This brings me to the main thesis of my paper, and it is twofold.

If we are to understand the role of the Spirit in forming the church as a publicly engaged body, then we should draw that picture within the parameters of the following two insights from the Lutheran tradition:

1). God's people are called to love the world precisely AS the world to a greater degree than the world loves itself.

2). Cultivating such love, paradoxically but inexorably, requires deep immersion in the particular gifts of the church – the word preached, the body and blood received, ongoing and rigorous catechesis in theology (both doctrinal and speculative), art, aesthetics, spiritual disciplines, and so on.

In other words, I'm suggesting that the example of the brothers of Tibherine, precisely in its glorious strangeness, is iconic for a precisely Lutheran construal of the Spirit's formation of a publicly engaged church. It is precisely the act of going more deeply into the gifts of the church in a manner that is formative of baptismal subjectivity (to use a phrase employed by Hinlicky and others) that allows the church to be incarnationally engaged in the world.

I hope that you're skeptical about that, because I have about half an hour left to try and convince you that it is at least possible. To do that I will draw on Luther in dialogue with some other thinkers that I find helpful for this.

## **The Horizon of Need and the Thickness of the Christian Life**

The argument of Luther's famed 1520 treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian* has at its core a thesis that Luther knew would be counterintuitive both by the synergistic soteriological standards of his day and, more penetratingly, by the standards

of what Luther took to be the epistemological “default setting” of the Old Adam when it considers the role of human effort both in salvation and in worldly ethics. Simply put, Luther’s target is the notion that only a synergistic model of salvation – one in which human agency responds to God’s initial donation of grace by doing those good works which are within them (*facere quod in se est*) to the benefit, not only of their own standing vis-à-vis God’s judgment, but also to the neighbor – can produce ethical action. Pious doubt about one’s salvation, so the argument goes, translates to pious action manifested most naturally in works of charity on behalf of one’s neighbor. The parallels to calls for a soteriology that replaces monergistic assurance with synergistic risk contingent on human agency in service to ethical care for the earth are fairly direct in this case.

What was behind Luther’s rejection of this soteriology? At stake was not simply Luther’s theological breakthrough vis-à-vis justification of the individual by grace through faith apart from works, but also his ethics. For Luther, far from it being the case that one needs a cooperative model of salvation in order to give sufficient theological grounding and impetus for charitable works on behalf of the neighbor, the exact opposite is in fact the case: ONLY under conditions of justification by grace through faith apart from works (that is, only under conditions whereby we do not NEED to do good works for our neighbor to be justified by God) are we free to do good works that are truly FOR the neighbor and not for ourselves.

The logic should be familiar to Lutherans: if I must somehow do good works – however praiseworthy and even necessary for the neighbor’s well-being – in order to merit justification, then those works are inescapably bound up in an economy of merit and reward that is not only existentially intolerable (how can I possibly know when I have done enough, and how can I possibly

remain in any sort of pious doubt about that when the stakes are so high?) but also fully lacking in genuine caritas. The motive of care in such cases can never purely be the desired good of the neighbor. The horizon of need being addressed is not the neighbor's, but mine; or, at least, when push comes to shove, if the two horizons contradict each other at all, mine must needs win out over the neighbor's. The high school senior who realizes that she needs more "community service" lines of her college application and thus walks down to the soup kitchen may well do some proximate good for the homeless there, but the dominant horizon of need is hers and not the suffering neighbors ostensibly being served.

However, to the extent that the Word is received that we are justified by grace through faith entirely apart from our own works, then the soteriological and ethical framework is secured by which the horizon of the neighbor's need can take precedence over my own and thus shape the framework of the ethical response. As Luther puts it, the Christian:

"needs none of these things for his righteousness and salvation. Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor. Accordingly the Apostle commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy, although he might have said that we should work to support ourselves. He says, however, "that he may be able to give to those in need" [Eph. 4:28]. This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire, and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law

of Christ [Gal. 6:2]. This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love [Gal 5:6], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.<sup>3</sup>

When we are freed of the existential burden of a soteriology that requires our good works for righteousness, we are entered into a more kenotic ethical economy whereby the horizon of the neighbor's need overtakes the need for us to preserve our own righteousness . It is liberating to do something purely for its own delight and goodness rather than because one expects to gain something by it. What's more, when our focus is reoriented away from our own need and toward the horizon of the neighbor, that which we do inevitably becomes more helpful and more just simply by the changed motivation and "economy" of activity.

So what emerges here, to repeat, is a situation in which, perhaps to a scandalous degree, Luther is understanding the public vocation of the Christian (and, by extension, the church) as kenotically emptying out its own "Old Adam" perceptions of how to be theologically righteous (i.e. sufficiently pure, religious, "churchy," etc.) in order to address the horizon of need of the neighbor – with all the messiness, "secularity," and gritty immersion into the blood, sweat, and tears of our world that that implies. Such a kenotic engagement IS the work of the Spirit in our world, and ecclesiology should take its cue from that.

Now, I'm fully aware that, on the surface, that could be heard as fairly standard, even cliché' stuff – such as in the ill-fated 1968 WCC slogan "the world sets the agenda for the church." But when placed within the context of Luther's writings as a whole, something far more interesting emerges. Indeed, even

within Freedom of a Christian, it is clear – the ONLY way that the sinful Christian can be freed to engage the neighbor within the messy horizon of the neighbor's need (think Algerian monks giving medical care to Muslim villagers as other Muslims threaten to kill them) is for the Christian to engage in substantive, ritualized, and ongoing immersion into the thickness of the church's own unique practices – again, hearing the gospel that we are freed from the demands of law and the demands of self-justification, receiving God's own self at the Eucharist, and – and here is the challenge even to gatherings such as this one where proper distinction between law and gospel is at the heart of your work – ongoing spiritual formation that allows for Christians to have this gospel discipline the formation that we receive elsewhere (particularly from the forces of neoliberal capitalism).

A word about that:

## **The Optics of the Market and of the Cross**

When I was a parish pastor in Gary, IN, which like most impoverished urban areas is heavily churchd, I once received a phone call from a local newspaper asking me if our congregation wanted to place an ad in the paper's "Religion Classifieds" section (which already tells you something right there). Without my asking, he proceeded to tell me that many local churches found it helpful to get the word out about their service times, etc.

This is common practice, and I have no real problems with it. But then he proceeded to say the following, "After all, it never hurts to get a leg up on the competition."

Think of that imagery. Churches advertising so as to get a leg up on their "competition," i.e. other Christian churches.

Trinity Lutheran vs. Christ the King Lutheran, advertising their wares in a manner structurally indistinguishable from Wal-Mart vs. Target.

My point is not to knock church advertising. My point is that I suspect many of us American Christians have internalized, wittingly or not, the notion that the church operates in what sociologists **have called** a “spiritual marketplace” in which our functional role is to provide a “product” in order to meet a given “demand.” In my own work I’ve tended to argue that the main issue with missional theology in the mainline churches have to do with a “if we build it, they will come” mentality; thus, what we should notice here is how neatly that mentality corresponds with capitulation to consumerism.

That’s one problem. But it’s a problem that we are not going to get our heads around until we realize how thoroughly consumerism comes with its own theology, its own psychology, its own ideas around what truth, beauty, and meaning constitute.

The Christian author Donald Miller, speaking at an ELCA Youth Gathering in 2006, once pointed out that conservative estimates are that the average American views hundreds, if not thousands, of advertisements every day (between Internet, tv, t-shirts, magazines, etc.). He then went on to describe – in terms that I continue to find quite compelling- that the main goal of advertising is to poke a tiny hole in our lives, a hole that can then be filled by the product on sale. If you put these two facts together, then the psychological picture that emerges is one in which most of us are walking around having thousands of tiny holes poked into our self-image, our sense of happiness, EVERY DAY.

And the effects of this are not benign. A stunning recent piece of art on the front of an avant-garde magazine focusing on

women's issues puts it bluntly. The image is of a young woman in heavy makeup, shaded in such a way as to simultaneously imply overuse of cosmetics and perhaps even physical or mental abuse, looking down, and the caption simply reads: "Call Us Ugly to Sell Us Shit." The feeling of ugliness, the attack upon the peace that comes with one's worth coming from something other than work and consumption, translates into further consumption.



We know what the concrete effects of this are. Eating disorders rampant among women AND men. Personal household debt through the roof. And so on. But all of these material effects are tied up in the deeper material problem, and that is this: WE CANNOT BE SATISFIED. And what I mean by that is not that we personally are incapable of being satisfied, but rather that we are all caught in a matrix of forces that have a deep interest in ensuring that we WILL not be satisfied, because satisfaction is dangerous.

The word "satisfaction" comes from the Latin "satis facere," and it literally means to "make enough," that is, to be in a condition in which one feels that one has enough. What I am saying is that in the 21st century we North Americans, along with an increasing percentage of the rest of the planet, are caught amidst forces who would be deeply threatened were we all to collectively decide that we are "satisfied," that we have enough of a given product. If I'm satisfied with my blue jeans,

I'm threatening the sale of Levi's. If I'm satisfied with my car, I'm of concern to Toyota. Indeed, the main indicator by which we measure the health of national economies in geopolitical terms is the "GDP," which measures GROWTH of economies as the primary indication that they are healthy.

This is not to say that Toyota, Diesel, the government, or anyone else is evil, though, because THEY TOO are caught up in the system of having to sell in order to survive, in order for people to feed their families. This is not "us" against "them." This is us against ourselves. And that's a spiritual problem.

One way we might conceptualize this is to think of the "optics" of the market. How does consumerism teach us to "see" the world?

Two theologians who have thought about these matters are Paul Griffiths (a Roman Catholic theologian who teaches at Duke University) and David Bentley Hart (an Eastern Orthodox theologian).

For Griffiths, the most corruptive aspect of the United States as such a "human city" is that it operates with a deficient notion of autonomy in which freedom is defined solely as the absence of dependence upon others. Moreover, perfect realization of this deficient autonomy finds actualization within a space whose logic feeds almost solely upon the construction of identity through unlimited consumption.

Ownership goes almost as deep [as commitment to autonomy]. Status is given principally by display of what is owned, and by capacity to increase what is owned and displayed. Among thoughts not thinkable is the idea that display can be excessive or that it is possible to own too much. The grammar of ownership has the syntax of consumption as a dominant element: the owner is someone who can buy; the act of buying, of purchasing, is the act by which owning is made real; and so

the purchasing act is one that ought to be performed as frequently as possible. To limit it, ascetically to constrain it, is understood not only to be odd and peculiar and strange, but also antisocial, a virus within the body politic. Frequent purchase, the act of consumption, is what we are urged and exhorted to; and so ownership is front-loaded into purchase, and purchase front-loaded into consumption. We become, ideally, owners who will not be deterred by the fact that we already own something from repurchasing it. We define ourselves, and are defined by others, principally in terms of what we would like to purchase. And when our autonomy is threatened by violence from without, by the decay of the body, or by betrayal, we comfort ourselves by going shopping...We can (we do) collude, as good shoppers, in our own tranquilization and the evisceration of compassion, sensibility, and love. We can (we do) deprive ourselves of the joy in the material world available only to those who refuse ownership of it.<sup>4</sup>

Griffith's point is that, to the extent that a community such as the church wishes to be the chief formative influence upon the sort of ends that believers choose, as well as the practices by which they reach these ends, it is (at least in the North American context, and increasingly the global one) in deadly competition with a force that has both the interest and the power to form both ends and practices within its domain. In other words, if the church has its own inherent logic, then so does the marketplace.

An equally vivid picture of the "marketplace" as a sort of overarching diagnosis of the Christian church's "other" is found in David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*. According to Hart,

The market transcends ideologies; it is the post-Christian culture of communication, commerce, and values characteristic

of modernity, the myth by which the economies, politics, and mores of the modern are shaped, the ideal space where desire is fashioned; it is the place that is every place, the distance of all things, no longer even the market square, which is a space of meetings, a communal space, but simply the arid, empty distance that consumes every other distance.<sup>5</sup>

Like Griffiths, Hart credits this market “empty distance” as having enormous power to shape desire (and thus, by extension, desired ends); unlike Griffiths, however, he envisions the market not as a rival public to the church but rather as the paradigmatic anti-public, a “no-space” which can thus insinuate itself into every space. Hart is clear that his naming of this force as the “market” is not a direct referent to free-market capitalism *per se*; rather, he sees the market as a kind of mentality which can, if necessary, inculcate itself into a variety of economic arrangements.

Hart’s account also proposes a link between the autonomous modern self who misconstrues freedom as pure autonomy to follow desire and the interested amenability of the marketplace to precisely such a formed personality. The hinge between the two is commodification, not simply of material products, but of those features of a person’s identity (particularly those formed in communities outside the marketplace, e.g. religious faith) that are not immediately possessed of an exchange-value within the market:

The market, after all, which is the ground of the real in modernity, the ungrounded foundation where social reality occurs, makes room only for values that can be transvalued, that can be translated into the abstract valuations of univocal exchange. And in the market all desires must needs be conformed to commodifiable options. The freedom the market acknowledges and indeed imposes is a contentless freedom, a

“spontaneous” energy of arbitrary choice; and insofar as this is the freedom that is necessary for the mechanisms of the market to function, every aspect of the person that would suppress or subvert this purely positive, purely “open” and voluntaristic freedom must be divided from the public identity of the individual, discriminated into a private sphere of closed interiority and peculiar devotion... persons (arising as they do from the often irreducible stresses of particular traditions, particular communities of speech and practice, even particular landscapes and vistas) must be reduced to economic selves, by way of a careful and even tender denudation and impoverishment; thereafter the “enrichment” of the person can only occur under the form of subjective choices made from a field of morally indifferent options, in a space bounded by a metaphysical or transcendental surveillance that views the person as utterly distinct from his or her aboriginal narratives, allowing these narratives the status perhaps of quant fictions but preventing them from entering into the realm of the real on other terms (as, say, persuasions, forces of contention that cannot be reinscribed as part of the playful agon of the market).<sup>6</sup>

This is heady language, but the point is relatively clear: when the marketplace shapes our identity, when all of the holes that advertising pokes into our identities come home to roost, then the effects are devastating both for our own identities and our communities. Think again of that image of the woman: commodification is abuse, but it is also the same sort of erasure, of eff-face-ment, that comes with both overuse of cosmetics and the facelessness conferred by abuse.

And I would suggest that, if we are to think about how mission interacts with the world’s questions around truth, beauty, and meaning, we should take this aspect seriously. My point in all of this has been to suggest that we live in a culture where

powerful forces (beyond any given individuals; think of the Bible's talk of "principalities and powers") are at work keeping people DEEPLY (one might even say "spiritually") dissatisfied so that the systems that profit from such dissatisfaction may flourish.

We may think eventually to try and change those systems; however, from a missional perspective, I would argue that all politics depend first upon worldview. So, theologically speaking, what is an alternate worldview to the one shaped solely by the marketplace?

In this setting I'll assume that you're all up on the Heidelberg Disputation, but let's just get the text fresh in our minds.

Theses 19-21 are, of course, the famous ones. Of particular interest here is Thesis 20 and its explanation:

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness. The Apostle in 1 Cor. 1:25 calls them the weakness and folly of God. Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of »wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering (*absconditum in passionibus*). As the Apostle says in 1 Cor. 1:21, For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his

glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise, as Isa. 45:15 says, Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself.

And then Thesis 21 goes on to state, famously:

21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers, works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil.

Consider this last thesis in connection with what we have been discussing: a theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is. Why? For Luther, it is for this reason: WHEN GOD WAS MADE MOST MANIFEST IN THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST, THIS TOOK THE FORM OF THAT WHICH THE WORLD CALLED UGLY. Jesus was a peasant carpenter and itinerant teacher from a backwater town who briefly engaged large crowds for a month or so, eventually fell out of their favor, and was crucified as a criminal by the Roman empire (one of the most shameful deaths for a Jew). God's truth in Christ took the form of what the world found ugly and pathetic.

As Lutheran theologian Vitor Westhelle has argued, this heritage from Luther – training us to see the presence of God in that which the world despises, calls ugly, regards as worthless – may be one of the most stunningly relevant aspects of our tradition in a world in which what Luther might call a “theology of glory” (that is, assuming that truth is most present in that which is beautiful, powerful, well-praised, etc.) dominates the logic of the marketplace. If the marketplace gives us a kind of optics, a “way of seeing” that sees ugliness in order to keep us

purchasing, then the “optics” of the cross trains us instead to see the world as God’s good creation in which it is precisely the outcasts, the marginalized, and the “ugly” in which we might expect to see God’s Spirit most at work (note that this applies to people, but perhaps increasingly also to creation itself as it suffers the effects of our constant need to consume unsustainably).

What does this have to say to the publicly engaged church? I think it’s this: if God hides in suffering, in that which the world calls weak, then perhaps one of the most significant contributions that Lutheran Christianity might bring to our context’s ongoing conversations about “truth, beauty, meaning, and justice” might be to think with others – Christian or not – as to how our minds have been trained to see beauty in those places advantageous to the marketplace, and to ask then how a different kind of optics, a different kind of “eyes” for the world, might disclose the presence of truth in that which cannot be easily commodified and sold within what Hart calls the “agon” of the market. To the extent that we as a culture can gradually emerge from our addiction to the consumerism that is killing us, it will not only have material effects but also spiritual effects. And one of those spiritual effects is that the good news, the gospel of a God who hides in weakness and suffering in order to find us and the world that God loves precisely amidst that suffering, might become a story that resonates with the pathos of the world to an even greater extent. This is what I mean when I say that an incarnational logic of the cross, born from formation by the gospel and its gifts, results in a situation in which the properly formed theologian, the properly formed Christian, loves the world more than the world loves itself.

The church cannot call the world ugly to sell it shit, or even to sell it gospel. The church must call the world blessed to

preach gospel to it.

## Implications

But let me conclude by making a few suggestions for what the things I've been able to sketch only briefly.

I've suggested that Luther's Freedom of a Christian teaches us that the gospel frees God's people to engage the horizon of the neighbor's need apart from the economies of self-justification. But I've also argued that this is not a one-off insight but requires ongoing and deep formation in the spiritual gifts and disciplines of the church. In incarnational fashion, the deeper we go into the things of Christ, the more "secular" (worldly) we become in that we engage more deeply the world qua world as the site of God's love and of God's redemption (this is what Bonhoeffer was getting at at the end of this life, I'm convinced – his saying that the Christian life needs to become more fully worldly is not a departure from the quasi-monastic vision of Life Together, but the further extension and radicalizing of it. I can say more about that in the Q & A if you like).

And I've suggested that part of what is at stake (and in keeping with the optical themes of Fr. De Chergé's letter) is a kind of optics of the cross that resists the optics of the marketplace. But here again formation and spiritual discipline is key. It is not optional as to whether or not we are formed – whatever formation is not done by the church, the market will do for us. But rather than thinking of church formation as a bunkering down in a kind of alternative society, the fundamentally Lutheran theological insight is that going deeper into the particulars of the church and the thickness of Christian life is not a retreat from the world, but a deeper dive into it. As the church becomes more itself, it becomes more secular, because the *saeculum* belongs to God by creation and to Christ by redemption.

As far as I can tell, Crossings does distinction between law and gospel pretty well. But my parting challenge: how can this group continue to think about the ways in which Lutheranism in its current manifestations empowers our people with the thickness of the Christian life, the material and spiritual disciplines that create a Fr. de Cherge (even if a Lutheran one), and – most of all – the realization that to go deeper into the love of Christ is to love the world as God loves it, which means more than it loves itself? I have been arguing that theology must give rise to formation, and a shadow supposition is that – as much as we theologians would love to think otherwise – such formation is not automatic from even the best theological formulations. It needs Spirit-led work. Are we up to the gift of that challenge?

### **References:**

- 1 <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/006-last-testament>
  - 2 Robert Saler, *Between Magisterium and Marketplace: A Constructive Account of Theology and the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).
  - 3 Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31:365.
  - 4 Ibid. 227-8. Cf. Griffiths, "Reading as a Spiritual Discipline," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 34ff.
  - 5 David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 431.
  - 6 Ibid., 432.
  - i <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/006-last-testament>
- [CrossingspaperPubliclyEngagedChurch \(PDF\)](#)

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# Ed Schroeder Weighs in on “Radical Hospitality”

Colleagues,

I spent my first four years as a young communicant at Concordia College in Adelaide, Australia. Those of us who boarded at the school went to church on Sunday at St. John's, the Lutheran congregation around the corner, where, in keeping with late-60's Lutheran practice in Australia and the U.S. alike, the Lord's Supper was celebrated once a month. I say “the Lord's Supper,” because no one outside the tiny high church crowd was thinking yet to call it “the Eucharist.”

Communing in those years entailed a ritual called “announcing for communion.” (I write this for younger readers who won't know about it.) At school it worked like this, at least for the boys who were housed on campus, as the girls were not: on the day before the sacrament was to be offered, those intending to receive would file in groups into the principal's office, where said principal, a Lutheran pastor, doubtless acting as an agent for the pastor at St. John's, would record our intention to receive in a ledger, offer some words of exhortation, and then walk down the line extending a hand of fellowship, without which none of us could dream of communing. The memory remains sharp of the day he bypassed the boy standing next to me and told him to stay behind. I winced for the lad as the rest of us filed out, though not so hard as I might have had I liked him more than I

did. Ah, the ways of the old flesh, hanging still around our necks, as Luther puts it.

Ah too, the distance we Lutherans have traveled in Eucharistic practice from then till now—this being the chief point of the story I tell.

Two years ago the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which since its inception has urged communion as an essential aspect of every Sunday liturgy, asked its pastors and congregations to study some new ideas about who to welcome at the table. Until now, baptism has been the essential precondition of Eucharistic participation. Most congregations, though not all, have also regarded some measure of education about the sacrament as a threshold for a first communion. To the horror, I'm sure, of our kindred in the right wing of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), affiliation with other churchly traditions has been treated as beside the point. "All baptized Christians are welcome to commune." Such has been the standard message for the past two decades in the standard ELCA worshiping assembly.

Comes now a push to expand that. The core idea, masticated for quite some time by progressive theologians, is that communion is an embodiment of the hospitality of God in Christ, who asked no questions about credentials when he passed around the loaves and fish, to cite but one example. Ergo communion is for everybody, baptized or not. Ideas need labels if others are to grab hold of them easily. The label here has been "radical hospitality." Such was the focus of the study that was urged in 2014, responses due by the end of June of last year.

For the record, I'm among those ELCA pastors who regard the notion as dubious at best. I have no present plans to trot it out at the congregation I serve. That said, where conversation

about it is sharp and thoughtful, I'm all ears, as indeed we're called to be in all things pertaining to the stewardship of the Gospel. With that in mind, I'm pleased this fortnight to pass along an analysis of the present matter by Ed Schroeder, with links to important background pieces that Ed will cite. The one by Paul Hinlicky of Roanoke College is especially germane, so take the time to read it.

Ed's undiminished knack, first encountered by some of us in seminary classrooms of yore, is to push all parties in a conversation to think more thoroughly about the matter at hand than they might otherwise. Even those whose minds are made up, yea or nay, about "radical hospitality" will want to read on. There's weighty stuff here. Hence the title of today's post.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

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## **Reflections on the "Radical Hospitality" Question**

by Edward H. Schroeder

A local Lutheran pastor asked me for my response to a [letter sent to all ELCA pastors](#) by the board of [Lutheran CORE](#), the ELCA resistance group. With repeated references to "[The Truth about 'Radical Hospitality,'](#)" an August, 2014 essay by Paul Hinlicky for [LutheranForum.org](#), the CORE group urged ELCA pastors to "join with us in opposing the practice of inviting the unbaptized to Christ's table."

I sent the pastor some thoughts prepared for a discussion on November 18, 2014, at Bethel Lutheran Church, University City,

Missouri, where Marie and I are members.

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1. There is no New Testament Greek term for the word Sacrament.
2. So far as I know, never does the New Testament link baptism and Lord's Supper under one overarching noun of any sort. Each, when mentioned and discussed, is not linked to the other.
3. Thus there is no New Testament precedent for saying, first be baptized, then get access to the Lord's Supper. Nor the reverse.
4. Likewise, the New Testament has no term analogous to "means of grace." Never does the New Testament discuss the various media ("means") whereby God's grace is offered and received, nor ever bunch those means of grace together as a package.
5. In the Smalcald Articles (Part III, Article 4) Luther lists five "ways" that the Gospel "gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace" (Kolb-Wengert, 319). For Luther, no one means of grace is specified as prerequisite for another.
6. So we are encountering language fashioned by early Christians—and by later Christians as well—for this conversation.
7. In the New Testament, "hospitality" (standard English translation of the Greek term *philoxenia*, literally, "love of strangers") is never linked to congregational practice—either of baptism or of the Eucharist.
8. Ergo, hospitality should be put on the back burner initially. Better to start with what the New Testament does say—and then with what early generations of Christians said when they talked about baptism and the

Eucharist.

9. However, the practices of these first generations shouldn't put obligations on us for how to proceed in our practice today—just as the practice of the apostles themselves reported in the New Testament itself is not necessarily binding upon us either. So practice may be changed, if there are sufficient “gospel-grounded” reasons to do so. The “historic rule of faith”—Paul Hinlicky's phrase for his position: “baptism first, then the Lord's Supper”—does not mean such “rules” cannot be changed.
10. For making changes in our practices around baptism and the Eucharist, we have a precedent in the Augsburg Confession itself: “The apostles commanded abstention from blood, etc. But who observes this command now? Those who do not keep it certainly do not sin, because the apostles did not wish to burden consciences through such bondage... For the general intention of the gospel must be considered in connection with the decree” (Kolb-Wengert, 101:645-66). [The Tappert rendering of the Latin *perpetua voluntas evangelii* is better: “perpetual aim of the gospel.” Literally it is “the perpetual will of the Gospel.”]
11. And from the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. “...the apostles themselves ordained many things that were changed over time, and they did not hand them down as though they could not be changed” (Kolb-Wengert, 291:16)
12. When we put hospitality on the back-burner initially, we can give theology itself primal consideration. Then we can devise our practice—what we propose to do—as a consequence of that theology. But always according to “what the perpetual aim of the Gospel is.”
13. The best term to start with is the key term that Paul uses when he writes about the Eucharist: “communion,” *koinonia* in Greek. The prime text: 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the

blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" *Koinonia* is the Greek term in both places.

14. For Paul, communion or *koinonia* comes in two flavors—determined by grammar. There is *koinonia* with a genitive case noun following, as in the Corinthians text above. There is also *koinonia* with the dative case for the noun that follows. They have very different meanings.
15. The dative case connotes HORIZONTAL togetherness linked to something common (the root meaning of *koinos*) to all. "We're all members of Bethel." "We all enjoy Ted Drewes frozen custard."
16. With the genitive, it is the VERTICAL connection to something or someone whereby we get a "part" of that something or someone. We receive a share, becoming shareholders; becoming a "part" of that reality. Therefore, according to Paul in Corinthians, in the Eucharist, Christ is imPARTing himself to the receivers. It is our PARTicipation in what is being imparted as we PARTake, becoming PARTners.
17. In Luther's two catechisms, the theology of the Lord's Supper focuses on *koinonia* with the genitive, our PARTicipation in the gift which Christ is imPARTing. And what is that?

[From the Small Catechism:] "Answer: We are told in the words 'given for you' and 'for the forgiveness of sins.' Namely, that in the sacrament the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are SHARED with us via such words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation... These words together with the physical eating and drinking constitute the core of the sacrament, and whoever trusts these words has a SHARE in what they actually mean, namely, the forgiveness of sins." And who is "worthy" to PARTake in this? Answer: "Truly worthy [is the one] who trusts these words 'for you' and 'for

the forgiveness of sins' ... for the words 'for you' call the heart simply to trust them." [EHS translation from the German text.]

19. In the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the words of St. Paul, "for all who eat and drink without discerning the Lord's body, eat and drink judgment against themselves" (1 Corinthians 11:29) were cited to support "just us true church folks are to come forward in our Lord's Supper events." The intent was to give, in effect, a "blessing" (by averting a curse) to the outsider.
20. In this practice, "not discerning the Lord's body" was understood as not knowing or believing the "real presence" doctrine.
21. But Paul's words in Corinthians 11:29 about "not discerning the Lord's body" need to be linked to his scoldings in earlier verses about the "drunken party" that apparently ensued now and then as part of Corinthian Eucharistic celebrations. For Paul, these drunken parties resulted in "contempt for the godly gatherings" of worship. In this way, the Corinthians were "not discerning the Lord's body," turning a "participation in Christ" into an orgy. The consequence: "eating and drinking judgment against themselves."
22. Back to Bethel. The "drunken orgy" distortion has never been our problem.
23. "Discerning the Lord's body"—both the body as participation in Christ (*koinonia*, genitive case) and as the horizontal fellowship of participants in Christ (*koinonia*, dative case)—can be expressed explicitly in the statement we put in the worship folder. It seems to me that we could improve our current statement by expressing more clearly how these two "communions" take place in the Eucharist.

24. Yes, our current policy is indeed different from the long tradition of church history. Taking our cue from our Augsburg-confessing predecessors, we still need to articulate HOW and WHY our current “changed” policy (“y’all come”) is indeed “what the perpetual aim of the Gospel is.”
25. I think it can be done, but we haven’t spelled it out at Bethel.
26. My own preference would be to scrub the welcome/hospitality reference entirely. What I’ve written above contradicts “Baptism first, only then the Lord’s Supper.” But Hinlicky is right in caveating any sort of “We’re more hospitable than you are!”
27. But Hinlicky is *not* right in citing the “historic rule” as unchangeable. At least, not for Augsburg Confession Lutherans. Even more dangerous, Hinlicky gets close to the Judaizing heresy that plagued those early Christians in St. Paul’s congregations. Making baptism a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s body—a “rule” that says: “you gotta first do this”—sounds frightfully close to “You gotta first be circumcised, and then....”
28. The issue here is not what’s now called “Eucharistic Hospitality,” but “what the perpetual aim of the Gospel is.” That’s what we are practicing at Bethel. It’s not us being hospitable. Rather, it’s the Lord of the Supper promoting his own “perpetual aim of the Gospel.” And that Gospel is “given for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

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P.S. In the discussions at Bethel last year, Marie and I told the story of our meeting a young couple at Sunday worship in Berlin years ago. We went to a congregation that was gaining members for the Sunday liturgy and not losing them as many German congregations were. We sat next to a young couple,

strangers to us, of course. It was a complete communion liturgy. After the benediction we got to talking. They asked us to join them for lunch. There we learned that they were once plain old pagans. They had no church connection ever. Never baptized. Then some friend invited them to come to this congregation. First time that they'd ever been in a church. They participated in everything. Went to communion too. "We met Jesus there in the communion," they said. "We're now active members; we've been back every Sunday since then." Here is a case study to illustrate Luther's Article 4 in Part III of Smalcald Articles (see above, Paragraph 5).