

In his genial intellectual memoir “Half a Lifetime with Luther in Theology and Living,” dean of Luther scholars Jared Wicks, S.J., recalls the impression made on him by reading Luther’s 1509 comment — and in so commenting Luther was, of course, following a centuries-old tradition — on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, Book 1, Distinction 17, where the remarkable claim is made that *Spiritus Sanctus est amor sive caritas qua nos diligimus Deum et proximum*, “the Holy Spirit is the love or charity by which we love God and neighbor,” and, further, that *cum ita est in nobis ut nos faciat diligere Deum et proximum tunc Spiritus Sanctus dicitur mitti vel dari nobis*, “when this charity is in us, so that it makes us love God and neighbor, then the Holy Spirit is said to be sent or given to us.” [1] What Peter Lombard thought to be a “necessary premise” [2] generated no little controversy in the long medieval conversation about the *Sentences*. So in 1964, it was of considerable interest to Wicks that “Luther found attractive Lombard’s idea that such charity is in reality the Holy Spirit itself pouring love into human hearts (Rom 5:5) to bring forth charity-in-action. Luther wanted to affirm with Lombard the immediacy of God’s interior presence and not posit a mediating created *habitus* of charity.” [3] The difference, somewhat crudely put, is that between *agapē* as God himself, at work “in” us but from irreducibly “outside” us, and *agapē* as something developed and exercised as an immanent, indigenous human ability.

I bring this up in the present context, first and more specifically because there is a not insignificant light thrown on our topic by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, to which I will only glancingly allude in what follows; and second and more generally because Luther’s contribution, at a very early stage, to this famously obscure (or obscurely famous?) dispute over what Philip Rosemann calls the “theological

dynamite” lit by the Master of the *Sentences* [4] may serve to remind us of a particular strength (it seems to me) of Lutheran theology, one of its gifts to the church: its upholding of the *externality* of the gospel, of God’s work in his gospel, to all human subjectivity, determination, and achievement. Whether we are speaking of the alien origin and nature of the divine righteousness, or of the rapture of the bound human will into freedom by God, or of the promise of grace through the Word and the sacraments in their fragile but irreducible material objectivity, the independence and priority of the gospel — the independence and priority of the gospel’s *God* — with respect to what we imagine we need or what we think we are worth or where we plan to take ourselves; the sovereign reality of God’s demand and gift, not only such that they precede, but also such that they define, our identity and situation and destiny, such that we are told these things, they are revealed to us, from outside ourselves, such that we are enfolded into a story that we do not write and whose conclusion is not up to us; the denial that the Spirit is given apart from the external Word, even though by that giving the Spirit is *interior intimo meo*, closer to us than we are to ourselves, and Christ is really present, not merely vividly recalled, in faith — all of this has been often enough and well enough belabored as characteristic of Lutheran teaching. (It is perhaps worth noting that some of the most accessible recent expositions have come from non-Lutherans like Wicks, Phillip Cary, and Carl Trueman. [5])

Now, it certainly seems to me that there is room for further and better theological work here. For example, the relation-in-distinction between what is of God the Creator and what is of us creatures cannot be taken care of by clichés, and bristles, as Lutherans well know, with problems on every side: interpretations of

determinism and predestination that tilt over into fatalism, deprecations of the significance of human action that invite antinomianism with open arms, and suchlike. Deeper exploration of the distinction between primary and secondary causality — indeed, a return to more sophisticated understandings of causation than bequeathed to us by modernity — might usefully occupy theologians looking for something to do. And, of course, what is meant by and what flows from participation, by the bringing of human life to share in the divine life through union with the divine-human Son, is of important and consequential theological interest.

But that what God does and gives is not to be identified or confused with — and is indeed the condition of possibility of — our native human capacities and endeavors, however we understand those, cannot be surrendered. And so there is a more direct connection between the gospel's externality, its "the-truth-is-out-there-ness," and our present concern. If studies such as those by Christian Smith of the "moralistic therapeutic deism" characterizing many American youth [6] even partially map the landscape of our religious culture, and if analyses such as those by John Milbank of the dominance in our political discourse of a sheerly voluntaristic and negative construal of freedom [7] even partially reflect the social milieu in which those of our young people not being brought up in caves are swimming — not to mention the orthodox-Christians-should-expect-the-increasing-marginalization-and-demonization-of-traditional-moral-convictions warnings sounded by such as Rod Dreher [8] or the education-and-social-formation-as-practiced-by-the-majority-culture-are-an-utter-catastrophe diagnoses rendered by such as Anthony Esolen [9] — if these lead to an even partial understanding of the actual, on-the-ground situation in which Lutheran congregations and seminaries are embedded as they

look for the next generation of pastors and ask how faithfully and responsibly to recruit and to train them, then perhaps we can see in all this a great door open, here on earth: a door open for renewed, and newly fruitful, Lutheran attention to this constitutive feature of our theological vision.

The autonomous twenty-first-century self, elevated to be the criterion and judge of authenticity and value, may look quite different from the “terrified conscience” addressed by the Confessions’ sixteenth-century reformulation of the gospel. (Although rage, depression, and alienation seem to be proteanly evergreen.) But the claim that good news for human beings — good because true, good because of God — comes from the outside, that neither justification nor sanctification (and setting aside such language would be a mistake) is in any way the product of or even in response to our manufactured desire or felt needs, that the idol factories and incurved imaginations of our hearts encounter not affirmation and comfort but judgment, and the destruction that precedes re-creation, as they are dragged into the light of God’s grace made flesh in Jesus Christ, poured out by the Holy Spirit, and presented through Word and sacrament, is directly and dramatically relevant to our understanding of the gift and task of confession, the mission to which the church has been called, in a postmodern world.

As we think about the formation and training of the next generation of Lutheran ministers of Word and sacrament, we can and should place emphasis on straightforward doctrine, on the *fides quae*, on the content of the creeds and the catechisms, as that — insofar as these faithfully expound scripture — in which lambs may wade and elephants swim. A Christian pastor who does not know — and

the sense of “know” I intend here, if not quite including connotations of sexual intimacy, is still far deeper than the mere ability to parrot a formula — the doctrine of the Trinity, the church’s recognition of the true God’s revelation and sharing of his own eternal reality, perhaps because he or she prefers instead to become expert in other, more “relevant” matters, is as poorly equipped as a would-be biologist unfamiliar with the inner logic and theoretical coherence of the modern evolutionary synthesis. Something similar could and should be held concerning the ability of a Lutheran pastor to interpret the two-testament Christian Bible in accordance with its wholeness and unity expressed in sprawling diversity, as the “pure, clear fountain of Israel” with its integrating center and goal in Jesus Christ the faithful Israelite. And one could continue: it will be crucial, in our time, not to stand down from the conviction that Christian faith is nothing less — more, but not less — than an account of the truth of God and the world, the way things really are and will be by God’s promise.

We would also do well to note — one might even say something like “take advantage of” — the formative influence of liturgies, which is to say of regular, embodied, communally practiced rituals, include those of worship, in human lives. As James K. A. Smith has recently emphasized (although this is certainly not completely new), we are bodies and minds, intertwined and integrated, and what we do repeatedly — even if it does not come to reflective consciousness and acknowledging that the correspondence is exceedingly complex — profoundly influences how we think, imagine, and desire. [10] Anyone who has heard (especially American) Christians say things like “I’m looking for a church where I can feel comfortable” or “I didn’t get much out of that worship” or “We need a contemporary service to connect with the

younger generation” can witness to the strength of the temptation to regard worship as a form of entertainment, which is to say, on the basis of assumptions and expectations dictated by a secular culture. This is not the place to argue, even if I wanted so to argue, for traditional forms of Christian liturgy as part of the education of Lutheran pastors. But it is appropriate to insist, first, that Lutheran pastors are to be trained as worshipping people and that their ministry is among worshipping people; and, second, that not every style and practice of Christian worship is structured by the same logic, and so that, to the extent that Lutheran teaching, by God’s grace, expresses the truth, we should wonder if the liturgies we inhabit are working — in terms of what they are saying and how they are forming worshippers at a subconscious level — in alignment or at cross-purposes with that teaching.

Renewed emphasis on doctrine and liturgy within congregations and seminaries would be strengthened in a specifically Lutheran direction — which is to say, in the direction of serving the church catholic in faith and mission, and in the direction of expecting God’s kingdom and the renewal of all things in Christ — by seeing the gospel’s externality in a way analogous to Robert Jenson’s description of the dogma of justification by faith: that is, as a hermeneutical stance, a way of interpreting the world and people’s lives in the world before the face of God, and as the corollary instruction for those called to the ministry of the gospel. In the case of justification, which we might regard in this light as a kind of sharpening of the general principle of the gospel’s externality, the practice is “so [to] speak of Christ and of the life of your community that the justification for that life which your words open is the kind grasped by faith rather than the kind constituted in works.” Indeed, “verbs

specifying the Spirit's work must be understood as instructions to preachers, liturgical leaders, teachers, and advisers," basically to tell people — from outside themselves! — what God has done and will do with them in Christ, and therefore who they are and what they mean. [11]

Or perhaps, along lines inspired by the argument from Luther's 1540 *Disputation on Christ's Divinity and Humanity* — *Spiritus sanctus habet suam grammaticam*, "The Holy Spirit has his own grammar" [12] — we might think of the gospel's externality as helping to make sense of the variety of Lutheran beliefs and practices, especially as over against otherwise-shaped ways of thinking and acting, other languages, as it were, that use superficially similar words and resources — notions of God, ideas about community, justice, and freedom, material objects like Bibles and fonts of water and loaves of bread as they appear amidst worshipping congregations — but are actually saying very different things and pointing in very different directions. Yet "saying different things" is a potentially ambiguous phrase. As a grammar is generative, allowing competent users to construct quite new but wholly comprehensible sentences, so, analogously, in the gospel's externality, the Holy Spirit may bring truth and light from the Word of God that stand in thorough continuity with ancient revelation but that confront present distortions and desperations "where they are."

These are heuristic images rather than analytical characterizations. Their main function is to suggest that the gospel's externality, its representation, as insisted on by Lutheran theology, of what we might call a radical critical realism, is not merely another item in a long list of things to be believed — not even merely as an answer,

even though it *is* an answer, to “Was ist das?” — but is more like a perspective, a vantage point from which to learn appreciation of the contrast between God’s work through the Spirit in Christ crucified and risen and our culture’s reduction of truth, goodness, and beauty to the arbitrary preference and decision of the sovereign individual self: a place for disciples, where we may be shown how to “call the thing what it actually is.”

The formation and training of the next generation of Lutheran pastors — indeed, the formation and training of the next generation of Lutheran disciples — must fundamentally and at every point along the line be given by the Holy Spirit, where and when he wills. But surely one of the many aspects of that gift is the opportunity to recognize again, and to commend again, God’s coming to his creatures as other than them and only so with them, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, in Word and sacrament, in demand and in promise, in this broken world meant to be the place of God’s dwelling with us. Because this God is the true God, we may indeed have hope.



1. *Magistri Petri Lombardi Parisiensis Episcopi Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae* (Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), 1: 142. English: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* (tr. Giulio Silano; Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007), 88 (spelling Americanized).
2. *Praemittitur quiddam ad hanc ostensionem necessarium, scilicet quod Spiritus Sanctus est caritas qua diligimus Deum et proximum*, “A certain premise is made which is necessary to this consideration, namely that the Holy Spirit is the love by which we love God and neighbor” (*Sententiae* 1.17.2).
3. Jared Wicks, S.J., “Half a Lifetime with Luther in Theology and Living,” *Pro Ecclesia* 22 (2013), 307–336, here 311.
4. Philipp Rosemann, “*Fraterna dilectio est Deus*: Peter Lombard’s Thesis on Charity as the Holy Spirit,” in *Amor Amicitiae — On the Love that is Friendship: Essays in Medieval Thought and Beyond in Honor of the Rev. Professor James McEvoy* (ed. Thomas A. F. Kelly and Philipp W. Rosemann; Peeters, 2004), 409–436, here 410.
5. For example, anticipating the contentions of this paper:

[T]he Christian life is not simply a matter of the passive reception of enlightenment from God. David also meditates upon the Word. He reads it, he speaks it out loud, he hears it read, and he even sings it. It is interesting that meditation is thus nothing like what we find in the contemplative piety of the medieval mystics, nor does it have any resemblance to what is called meditation today. Meditation for Luther is active and practical. It is also oriented, once again, to the Word, a point that he emphasizes in order to distinguish his position from that of the radicals who stress the inner leading of the Spirit. For Luther, the Spirit is only given with the external Word. Indeed, this emphasis on the external Word shows that, in Luther’s mind, personal piety and corporate piety flow into each other: the Word must come from outside; sometimes that is by reading or reciting it to oneself; at other times, it comes from hearing it read and expounded in church. ... Luther sees that when it is the time of public worship, the troubled or lethargic soul would be better served in the context of the gathering of the saints. This is what one would expect from a theology that puts so much emphasis upon the Word coming from the outside. I can sit in my room and read my Psalter, which is fine; or I can go to hear the Word sung and proclaimed to me by others, which has a confrontational, external aspect to it over which I have no control and toward which I cannot be neutral but must respond either in unbelief or in faith. This point cannot be stressed enough. In our own day, biblical counseling has become a very trendy and attractive movement within the church, particularly in cultures where there is a strong emphasis on secular counseling and psychology. Luther’s equivalent of this was the practice of private confession and absolution, a practice (we have noted) that he maintained himself and commended to others. Yet Luther would never have regarded such private dealings as having equal importance to what happened in church or as being a replacement for regular attendance at the

corporate means of grace. ... [Luther's] introspection was always a stepping-stone to looking at the outward and objective in Word and sacrament; and he would not really have understood revivalist conversionism, given that he would have regarded his baptism as his moment of entry into the church. (Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* [Crossway, 2015], 118, 120, 132)

Today's evangelical Christians are taught to find God by listening for the voice of the Spirit in their hearts. My students typically think this is what it means to know God. This theology will hardly help them resist a culture that is all about celebrating the desires we find within us. If the true God is the God of our experience, then why can't the voice of liberated desire be the Spirit of God? Something crucial drops out of our religious experience when we make the theological turn to experience. We fail to learn from external authority, which is to say the authority of an Other. Americans are not good with external authority, and American evangelicals have for quite some time been quietly dropping — in practice though not in theory — their old love affair with the authority of Holy Scripture. They are trying to be “personal” in a way that ends up losing the sense that God is a real person who comes to us from outside our own lives. They forget the old Protestant conviction that Christ comes to us in the external word of the Gospel, as a Bridegroom promising himself to his Bride. In our common efforts to learn how to do Christian formation under the new regime, evangelicals could do other Christians a great service by reigniting their love for the authority of this word, knowing that the Beloved we seek is found in our hearts only when he is first found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only when we love the authority of this Other, this real person who comes to us from outside ourselves, will we find ourselves glad to obey his commandments. (Phillip Cary, “The Benedict Option for Evangelicals,” *First Things* website, 2015; also cf., importantly, “Why Luther is Not Quite Protestant: The Logic of Faith in a Sacramental Promise,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14 [2005], 447–486)

6. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

7. John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

8. Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel, 2017).

9. Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Regnery, 2017).

10. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009); *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Baker Academic, 2013); *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Brazos, 2016).

11. Robert W. Jenson, “The Holy Spirit,” in *Christian Dogmatics* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Fortress, 1984), 2: 101–178, here 130, 133.

12. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Böhlau, 1883–1993), 39/II: 104. Cf. Lois Malcolm, “The Generative Grammar of the Holy Spirit,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014), 423–444.