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The Law and the Lord's Supper

Since the law and gospel are so central to Lutheran theology, it should have been expected that their relationship to one another and their function in Christian life would eventually disrupt The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). While the dust from the 1970s has settled down on our side of the fence, this is still a live issue in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) which has not resolved the question of whether certain persons, because of different orientations, may be kept out of the ministry. The “gospel argument” as it started out in the LCMS is that biblical strictures were limited to Old and New Testament times and are not applicable today. Scott R. Murray’s *Law, Life, and the Living God*, which lays out historical and theological issues on the third use of the law among twentieth-century American Lutheranism, was at the center of a past symposium. Murray puts his oar in the water again in the lead article of this issue.

The remaining articles address the Lord’s Supper, each coming from a different angle. Peter J. Scaer finds in the miraculous feedings in Mark’s Gospel allusions to the Lord’s Supper as not only a well-ordered sacred banquet but also an occasion for discourse. With recent Lutheran rapprochements with the Episcopal Church in America and the Church of England, Lutherans remained haunted by how close their Reformation era forebearers were in the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper during the Reformation era. Answering part of this question is Korey D. Maas’s article on Robert Barnes. Who may be admitted to the Lord’s Supper is a perennial issue in the LCMS. Joel D. Biermann, from our sister seminary, presents familiar arguments in a fresh manner in “Step Up to the Altar.” The April 2008 visit of the pope to our country keeps alive the Reformation era discussion of how our church should relate to Rome. If a fence were drawn down the middle of world Christendom, Lutherans would be on the same side with Roman Catholics looking at the Reformed on the other side. Opportunity for further discussion has been made by the accession of Joseph Ratzinger as bishop of Rome. A world renowned theologian in his own right, Benedict XVI was friend to the late confessional scholar Hermann Sasse. Coming from Germany, he has an intimate knowledge of Luther that was lacking in his predecessors. Presenting an in-depth, insider’s examination of the current pope’s views on the Lord’s Supper is Father James Massa. We call attention to the third section of his article, “Difficulties with Luther,” especially footnote 18. These articles are sure to stimulate reflection on our own faithful confession and administration of this blessed sacrament.

David P. Scaer
Editor

Theological Observer

Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006)

A few years before his death on May 13, 2006, Jaroslav Pelikan left the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and, along with his wife, was chrismated in the Orthodox Church. Eastern Orthodox churches have been known to administer baptism to those baptized in Protestant churches; the parish worshipping at Saint Vladimir's in Crestwood, New York, where Pelikan joined, at least recognized the legitimacy of his baptism administered by a Lutheran pastor (in his case, his father). Chrismation, the rite of anointing with oil, follows baptism and is administered by a priest. It corresponds, but not exactly, to the Roman confirmation which is administered in adolescence by a bishop. In the early church, it was administered to those who had been baptized in erring or heterodox churches and were entering the fellowship of an orthodox church (lower case).

All this might not mean too much except that Jaroslav Pelikan had been baptized by his father in a congregation of the Slovak Synod which, for all practical purposes—even when it was separate synod—was part of the Missouri Synod. It maintains its autonomy as a separate district and is known as the SELC, which stands for the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. In some minds, it still stands for the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church. The name "Pelikan," along with "Daniel," was virtually interchangeable with the Slovak Synod. His maternal uncle was Theodore Daniel, a president or vice-president of the Synodical Conference in its dying days. Other family members were pastors; one family member was a layman who served in the leadership of the Missouri Synod.

Even if Pelikan by blood and environment belonged to the Slovak Synod, he was a *Wunderkind* that the Missouri Synod claimed for itself. Much about him belongs to legendary narrative, but this literary genre closely corresponds to reality. On weekends during St. Louis student seminary days, he took the train to Chicago and served as a vicar for his father. Stories floated around that at the right price he would put together a Bachelor of Divinity thesis for a less committed and gifted student. At age twenty-four, he graduated from the St. Louis seminary, received an M.A. from Washington University (which is virtually adjacent to the seminary campus), and also received a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. What else would anyone do with his spare time on weekends in Chicago? His teaching career took him from the St. Louis seminary back to the University of Chicago and finally to Yale University where he was the Sterling Professor of Church History. He had more than his fair share of honorary degrees. Some years back it was rumored that he was being considered for the Yale presidency. This did not happen. All this information about a deceased scholar would not matter except that his name appears as the general editor of the fifty-five volumes in the American Edition

of *Luther's Works*, published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, a joint project of Lutheran denominations that have since gone their separate ways. Through this project, Pelikan's name has found its way onto the shelves and computers of Lutheran pastors across the world. Here comes the hard part. He died in the Orthodox Church. As with others, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had followed a path he could not take, but there is more to it than this. Robert Louis Wilken, another Missouri expatriate and a classmate, in his "Tribute to Jaroslav Pelikan" (*Pro Ecclesia* 16 [2007]: 123–125), provides us with a clue: "Pelikan had the linguistic gifts, the scholarly discipline, and imagination to display the entire sweep of the tradition on the basis of his own reading of the primary sources" (124). The Lutheran heritage was too limited. It took him back only five centuries. Pelikan's world included the ancient church.

My contact with Pelikan was tangential. As a college student at Concordia Bronxville, I heard him preach at Christ Lutheran Church in Yonkers, New York, where Richard Koenig served as pastor. He preached on Matthew 11:4–6, Jesus' answer to John the Baptist on whether he was the Christ. In the order in which the messianic signs were given, the poor hearing the gospel ranked above the miracles, even the raising of the dead. To this date, I have not come across one sermon on this text which proceeds in this way. Pelikan was right. The preaching of the gospel has the ultimate significance. His *From Luther to Kierkegaard* brought suspicions that he was a Barthian, as did his *Luther the Expositor*, which was attached to the tail end of the American Edition of *Luther's Works* where it had no place being. In terms of the 1950s, his concern was right, but his opponents—in affirming Scripture as the word of God—may not have developed the implications that the word of God applied to the gospel and Christ himself as a constellation.

Pelikan's biographer will have to sift through this, but a person who dies in a church of the Eastern Orthodox communion probably does not depart this world as a Barthian. Disturbances in the 1970s led him to leave the Missouri Synod, but he did not join the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches which had been formed to support the St. Louis faculty majority. He left without the fanfare of media coverage. Pelikan phoned Missouri Synod president J. A. O. Preus II that he was joining a Lutheran Church in America congregation. He remained a member of that congregation in Hamden, Connecticut, until a few years before his death. Pastors with less than thirty years of service in the ministry may not be aware of Pelikan's place in the Missouri Synod's blood stream and annals. For those who knew him, or of him, how was it that a Luther scholar could be laid to rest "in the Liturgy of the Orthodox Church" (Wilken, 125)? Is the important theological question how one dies or how one is buried? Here is the answer: "When I [Wilken] visited him in March (2006) he [Pelikan] told me that he was listening mostly to the B Minor Mass. Though he loved Bach's cantata and the St. Matthew Passion, as he awaited death he was drawn to the Latin Mass in Bach's

glorious setting. For here there are no narrative recitative, no interpretative arias, only words of supplication, praise, gratitude, confession, and hope, and the quiet confidence—evident already in the opening strains of the *Kyrie eleison*—that one’s voice, when joined with that of the church, is heard” (Wilken, 125). Sounds like he died a Lutheran . . . “quiet confidence” says it all.

David P. Scaer

Musings on the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)

I had not been to a meeting of the SBL since 1988 in Chicago. An old friend (now deceased) and author of an Anchor Bible Commentary on Mark, C. S. Mann, called this annual gathering either a circus or a carnival (I do not remember which, though both labels fit). Things have not changed, yet there still are some delectable items on the scholarly menu. For years I was tangentially associated with William R. Farmer’s Gospel group which bucked the still trendy Markan priority by advocating a return to Matthean priority. After Farmer’s death, the group faded from sight, but then came an invitation to meet with the group’s survivors at San Diego in 2007. At the center of the group is David L. Dungan, whose *A History of the Synoptic Problem* is as compelling as it is good reading. Regretfully the 1999 Doubleday publication is out of print and the holders of the copyright are holding it captive. New Testament scholarship has too much resting on Mark being first to give rein to the old church tradition about the order of the Gospels.

My experience then moved from the nostalgic to the novel. Meeting simultaneously with the SBL at the San Diego convention center, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) had seminars on Buddhism, Sikhism, Queer Theory, Lesbianism, Global Warming, and a dialog between Evangelicals and Mormons. The speaker for the early Sunday morning breakfast for Lutheran professors sponsored by Fortress Press was John Dominic Crossan, a Roman Catholic scholar who sees Jesus as a wandering peasant. Less esoteric were the Yoga, Ecology, Chinese Philosophy, and Hindu study groups. Many presenters at SBL or AAR may be the college religion teachers of your parishioners’ offspring. Ben Witherington of Asbury Seminary surgically removed with grammatical aplomb any arguments from the Pastoral Epistles disallowing women preachers. Paul’s use of the present tense in disallowing women to teach is place-specific, that is, he intended it only for that church. In any event, teaching has nothing to do with an authoritative communication of doctrine. At that time and place Paul was opposed to women teaching anything. Get it?

Among the items attracting me to the San Diego gathering were several presentations by Bishop N. T. Wright of Durham, England. On Sunday morning he preached to an overflowing audience at a service sponsored by the

Institute for Biblical Studies, a group of Evangelical scholars. His afternoon lecture, "God in Public? The Bible and Politics in Tomorrow's World," developed the theme introduced in the morning sermon, so there was nothing new. Evangelicals, like their historical Reformed forefathers, see religion as a force shaping society. Disagreement with him on this or that issue does not detract from the force of his presentation and commitment to traditional Christianity. Wright is among several English university scholars who are insisting on the historical character of Christianity using critical arguments. The afternoon lecture was sponsored by SBL and again part of an overflowing audience was left sitting on the floor or standing outside the door.

A two-and-a-half-hour session was set aside Saturday for four 20 minute critiques of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimonies* by Richard Bauckham. Like the biblical Daniel, his response indicated that he had survived the wolves. Rather than discrediting critical scholarship, scholars like Bauckham, Wright, and Larry Hurtado (who was also there) have used critical methods to demonstrate the probability of the biblical accounts, including the resurrection. Amazingly these scholars have sprung up in the secular environment of the United Kingdom where the established church has lost its grasp on the public mind. While elements in the LCMS were overtaken from the 1950s through the mid-1970s by Bultmann's demythologizing, which has long been off the scholarly radar screen, some Evangelical scholars have embraced historical study of the Scriptures to go on the offensive. Without surrendering their commitment to biblical authority, they have built their arguments for Christianity on critical methods. Weakly attended sideshows on obscure topics abound at these kinds of gatherings, but the Evangelicals have proven themselves the one force with which to be reckoned. They had the crowds and the SBL will most likely continue to give them center stage to guarantee the popularity of its annual meetings. Lutherans had a consultation, but in comparison with the Evangelicals it was only a splash.

One of the more entertaining sessions I attended was entitled, "Books on the *Gospel of Judas: An Evening with the Authors.*" No less than thirteen authors were featured! A University of Washington professor sat next to the podium with watch in hand to enforce a five minute limit for each author's comments. Even though a long, narrow and inadequate room may have hindered give-and-take, and we had to cope with the noise from the freight train that passed nearby during the session, this was the best show of the weekend. Present were world class luminaries. Gerd Lüdemann, a professor at Göttingen and member of the Lutheran Church—widely known for his denial of the resurrection of Jesus—denied that Judas betrayed Jesus. For him "hand over" does not mean "betray." Bart Ehrmann defended the view that orthodox Christianity was the result of a political victory over Gnosticism. He has authored the Oxford University Press textbook *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings* that is used in many colleges. Elaine Pagels of Princeton and Karen King of Harvard argued that the *Gospel of Judas*

was a needed feminist response against the blood and guts of the canonical Gospels. A young female German scholar was given the privilege of showing her recently published reconstruction of the *Gospel of Judas*. The original manuscript is not complete, so she and her fellow researchers filled in the blanks with possible reconstructions. April DeConick of Rice University offered a blistering critique of the first English translation and sensationalized interpretation done by the National Geographic team as well as the shrouded and unscholarly manner in which they released their findings. This team that did the initial translation and interpretation of the *Gospel of Judas* had agreed in writing not to share their findings in advance with other scholars. So much for making sure you have it correct before it is in print!

During the discussion it came to light that publishing linked to the *Gospel of Judas* involves big bucks, even in excess of a million dollars. Apparently the love of learning is not the only motivation for some scholars to toss their hat into the Judas ring. James Robinson noted that he alone has received \$100,000 for his book on the *Gospel of Judas*. He proceeded to chide himself for writing a book about a manuscript that he had not yet personally examined. Shortly thereafter, Bishop Wright quipped that if discussion should not be allowed over the *Gospel of Judas* before the actual manuscript is examined, what does this say for "Q" scholarship and publications over the past fifty years? A roar went up from the crowd, who knew well that "Q" exists only in the minds of scholars.

The large space set aside for booksellers was a pure delight. Along with the book buying, scholars were meeting with editors to publish their manuscripts. There was the temptation to buy from avowed atheist publishers, but why support unbelief? Next year in Boston the SBL will meet just before Thanksgiving, while the AAR is headed for Chicago a few weeks earlier. It probably will be less fun without them, but with 2008 presidential elections over they will have to talk about somebody else besides Bush. With fewer attendees, Boston may offer more compact arrangements than the sprawl of the San Diego convention, which almost resulted in missing the Judas show.

After such a smorgasbord of opinion, it is hard to say where theology is going. Perhaps it is better not to know but to pick and choose from the Evangelical crumbs. Both LCMS seminary faculties were well represented. Among old time acquaintances were Horace Hummel, Norman Habel, Edgar Krentz, John Huber, Mike Horton, Hans Schwartz, and Carl Braaten.

David P. Scaer

Is Christianity Today Looking for Liturgy?

In a previous *Theological Observer*, I commented on the contemporary worship phenomenon, saying that "it is not nearly so settled as some might be led to believe" [CTQ 71 (2007): 370]. As if my comment needed corroboration,

the folks at *Christianity Today* kindly obliged in their February 2008 issue with a cover story titled: "The Future Lies in the Past." The author, Chris Armstrong, describes himself as a born-again Christian, nurtured in a charismatic church in Canada, who felt, nevertheless, that something was missing.

Armstrong's article provides a brief overview of this "movement within a movement." Those who are familiar with American Evangelicalism are aware of its leading role in the Church Growth Movement and its immense influence on church life throughout North America, blurred denominational lines and all. It is less well known that among these same Christians there has been—now for three decades—considerable movement in a very different direction. More than a decade ago (October 1997), *Christianity Today* published another significant article titled: "Missing God at Church? Why So Many Are Rediscovering Worship in Other Traditions." Before that, Thomas Howard laid out his reasons for leaving Evangelicalism in *Evangelical Is Not Enough* (Nelson, 1984). Indeed, this soul-searching among Evangelicals goes all the way back to Robert Webber's *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Zondervan, 1978), the first of Webber's dozens of books and articles on this topic.

The author of the most recent contribution cited above acknowledges that this search by Evangelicals for more substance has led in any number of directions. For example, at one evangelical college large numbers of students are drawn to the liturgical style of the Episcopal Church, "despite the misgivings many share about the theological directions of that denomination." Similarly, others have over the past decades been drawn both to Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox Church, with some prominent Evangelicals actually jumping ship and converting.

What I find surprising in this entire discussion is that Lutherans seem to be nowhere on the radar screen. Despite the rich liturgical heritage that has been handed down among us since the time of the Reformation, most Evangelicals seem to be unaware of the treasures that the Lutheran Church has to offer to those who are yearning for a fuller expression of the faith. Perhaps it is the case that we Lutherans have simply not trumpeted our theological and liturgical sensibilities much beyond our own circles. We all know of the prominent role played by Episcopalians in our nation's history. For example, a dozen of our presidents have had some sort of affiliation with this church body. The sheer size of the Roman Catholic Church ensures that it will not be overlooked. As for Lutherans, it's understandable that we might be missed.

Could it be that we have not been noticed because we are unsure ourselves about the place of our liturgical heritage in today's church as well as the church of tomorrow? This is certainly not the first time that Lutherans have questioned the validity and importance of liturgy and the church's song. Centuries ago Pietism and the Enlightenment delivered a one-two punch that stripped faithful Lutherans of the rich heritage that their forefathers had handed down to them. While a renewed interest in that heritage has emerged

during the last one hundred and fifty years (beginning with C. F. W. Walther and Wilhelm Loehe in the nineteenth century), new challenges continue to surface. Instead of embracing our treasures of liturgy and song, there has been a tendency in recent decades to abandon this birthright in favor of other models of worship that are considered more effective and responsive to the perceived needs of the congregation.

Rather than arguing *against* contemporary worship, however, I would like to make the case *for* the church's liturgical heritage. Of course, that's a tall order that requires far more space than is permitted here. For now, this one point will have to suffice—namely, that before we throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater, we take a moment to consider why other church bodies, traditionally not of a liturgical bent, have become so interested in the heritage that we take for granted. Could it be that they are on to something that has been right under our noses all along?

Paul J. Grime

Season of Creation

Those looking for variety in the traditional church calendar may be attracted by a season of creation as a way to "celebrate Earth as a sacred planet filled with God's vibrant presence." Its goal is for Christians to "go forth on a mission to be partners with Christ in the healing of the planet." A three-year series is proposed for the eight Sundays beginning with the first Sunday in September, each with its own name: Creation Day; Forest Sunday; Land Sunday; Outback Sunday for Australians and Wilderness Sunday for others; Social Justice Sunday; Blessing of the Animals, also known as St. Francis of Assisi Day; and River Sunday. An introductory brochure lays out the reasons for this novel and, depending on one's perspective, necessary innovation: "There is a growing concern in Christian communities about the ecological crisis and the way human beings have been treating God's earth. Planet earth is in peril. All creation is suffering." Referring to the earth as God's possession reflects Genesis 1:1 and the Psalms, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness therefore." Paul said the creation's suffering in bondage would be relieved with the appearance of believers as the sons of God (Rom 8:18-25). Our planet has been in a downward spiral since Genesis 3 and as custodians over creation Christians will work with others to keep things in good order, or at least to prevent an even more rapid deterioration, but some factors are beyond human control. Readings from Matthew, Mark, and Luke fit the standardized three-year series. Appropriate liturgies and accompanying Bible studies are also available (see www.seasonofcreation.com). In America the contact person is David Rhoads (drhoads@lstc.edu), a professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

David P. Scaer