

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

FALL 2008

“I am an Augsburg Lutheran”

Lou Hesse

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Moses Lake, WA

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It is an intriguing question, isn’t it? Why are you an ELCA person, an LCMS person, a WELS person, an LCMC person, an AFLC person, a [fill in the blank] person? It’s a curious thing, I think, how we eventually arrive at the point of faith we’re at now. For what it’s worth in the grand scheme of things, here’s how I got to be an Augsburger.

I was baptized and confirmed in a typically stolid Missouri Synod fashion. Baptized at one month of age and dutifully taken to church by my parents and friends often enough that I earned a number of those perfect attendance lapel pins that Missouri used to give (do they still do that?) to children as a reward for being in church every week. I had one pastor growing up. Pastor Reule served at Trinity in Hillsboro, Oregon, for 40 years. He baptized my mother and me and retired between my first and second year confirmation classes. A brilliant old theologian in the Herr Pastor mode, my father insisted

that I pay close attention to him when I entered catechism class, as I would be learning the most important things to learn from a man who knew these things well. I did quite well at memorizing Concordia Publishing House’s Luther’s Small Catechism with questions – work that has stood the test of time as an asset for understanding.

Through junior high school and college, I continued to explore this thing called faith and its meaning. We are saved by grace through faith after all, and I wanted to make sure I had enough of this thing called faith to do the job. That was the vexing question, however – how much is enough, and if I have enough, why can’t I stop sinning? I really worked, questioned, and prayed about this, but I could never really find comfort and solace about the state of my faith, because I could always see where it needed improvement.

I stumbled through adolescence and into early adulthood as most of us do, graduated from college and returned home to farm the family operation with

The mission of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches is to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We resist any corruption of this Gospel. Looking to the cross of Christ, we proclaim God’s Word as Law and Gospel for the redemption of his people today. May God help us to the glory of his holy name. Amen.

“I am an Augsburg Lutheran”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE.

my parents. God provided a wonderful wife to share my life, and we set a typically devout pattern (sort of) for us and our children. Regular church attendance and volunteering for various tasks in our congregations (all of the things to do) took up our time.

In the normal course of events an odd thing happened – word went out from Higgins Road that they needed

“a middle aged white lay male conservative who is not afraid to speak his mind” to serve on the ELCA Sexuality Task Force, and for some reason my bishop thought of me. To make an already too-long story shorter, as a member of said task force I thought I should hear what Robert Gagnon had to say on the sexual-ity issues we were dealing with. When I discovered he was going to be the guest presenter at an Augsburg District gathering in Audubon, IA, I told Debbie we should go. I’m a graduate of Iowa State University and like Iowa anyway, and besides, it was probably going to be my only chance to hear Dr. Gagnon personally (a premonition which was true, by the way).

So Debbie and I found ourselves at Audubon involved in an Augsburg gathering. I remember virtually nothing about that gathering today except that a little old preacher from Bismarck, ND got up to lead a Bible study on Galatians 2:19-20. He positively railed at us on the theme that “you are DEAD in trespass and sin and Christ is your life!” Everything changed that day. John Wesley reported that his heart was “strangely warmed” when he heard Luther’s commentary on Romans. Luther said it was the gates of paradise being flung open when he understood Romans 3:23. I knew the feeling when I heard Dick Smith preach. It is not about me and my faith but it is about Jesus and his promises. It’s not a question of my willing but a ques-

tion of ontology (the state of real being). Once the lens of free will thinking had been shattered and replaced with the lens of thinking in terms of being, things began and continue to fall into place. It’s all found in the “I AM” statements – “I am the Lord your God” announced to Abram – there is no choice stated there. All of Jesus’ I AM statements in the Gospels – it’s about being, not about choices, not about decisions,

not about accepting. And of course, “I am a sinner in need of redemption” – that sums it all up from my side.

Once this ontology falls into place, everything else pales. Other churches dance around the question of ontology with their agendas and pieties and usually end up in some sort of free-will decision making process which leaves us all stuck in the law. In Augsburg, I hope, our emphasis is always on the proclamation of the change in our being won by the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross. We must be a forgiveness-driven church. We are dead – Christ is our life!

Is Augsburg perfect? Not by a long shot – we’re all sinners, after all – but Augsburg is where the Holy Spirit revealed the glory of the Gospel to me and that is

the treasure in the field that the rich man sold all he had to possess. It is my hope and prayer that Augsburg remains a fellowship of sinners living in the glory of the forgiveness of sins won for us and dedicated to proclaiming the great I AM. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”*

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“For through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:19-20

MARTIN'S CORNER

“ALL IS YOURS” by PAUL TILLICH

“If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.”

— 1 Corinthians 3:18-19

WHEN A SPEAKER IN A MORNING CHAPEL SERVICE USED THIS as his text, I got a written question in class: “What do you think about this morning’s sermon?” And this was the implication: How can philosophy stand in view of Paul’s depreciating words? I want to answer by trying to interpret what I believe Paul means, not only in the passage above but in the whole context. At the end of his discussion he gives the key by saying: *Let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s* (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

Paul has asked, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” And now he exclaims, “World and life and Apollos are yours.” This means that the wisdom of the world is ours also. How could it be otherwise? We could not even read Paul’s words without the wisdom of the world which enables us to understand ancient texts, which gives us the technical tools to spread the Christian message all over the earth, which produces and sustains the political and educational and artistic institutions which serve and protect the Church. All this is ours. And even the different theologies are ours: the more dialectical one of Paul, the more ritualistic one of Peter, the more apologetic one of Apollos. There is only one type of theology which Paul dislikes—that which wants to monopolize the Christ and call itself the party of Christ. For each of these theologies wisdom of the world is needed; scribes are needed, debaters are needed, philosophers are needed, a language is needed to which everybody contributes. It is impossible to deny all this. But it is possible to discredit through loose talk what one cannot avoid using at the same time. There is a deep dishonesty in the accusation against the use of historical research and philosophical thought in theology. In daily life one calls somebody dishonest who brings defamation upon those whom he uses. We should not commit this dishonesty in our theological work. And we cannot escape using the wisdom of this world. It is no escape if we say: Let us use a little of it, but not much, in order to escape the dangers implied in it. This certainly is not what Paul means. **The whole world is yours**, he says, the whole life, present and future,

not parts of it. These important words speak of scientific knowledge and its passion, artistic beauty and its excitement, politics and their use of power, eating and drinking and their joy, sexual love and its ecstasy, family life and its warmth and friendship with its intimacy, justice with its clarity, nature with its might and restfulness, the man-made world above nature, the technical world and its fascination, philosophy with its humility—daring only to call itself love of wisdom—and its profundity—daring to ask ultimate questions. In all of these things is wisdom of this world and power of this world and all these things are ours. They belong to us and we belong to them; we create them and they fulfill us.

But...and this “but” of Paul’s is not one of those “buts” in which everything is taken back that was given before. The great “but” to the world which is ours gives both the foundation and the limit of the world that is ours: **“And you are Christ’s,”** namely, that Christ whose Cross is foolishness and weakness to the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of this world in all its forms cannot know God, and the power of this world with all its means cannot reach God. If they try it, they produce idolatry and are revealed in their foolishness which is the foolishness of idolatry. No finite being can attain the infinite without being broken as He who represented the world, and its wisdom and its power, was broken on the Cross. **This is the foolishness and the weakness of the Cross which is ultimate wisdom and which is the reason that Christ is not another bearer of wisdom and power of this world but that He is God’s. The Cross makes Him God’s.**

*“The whole world is yours ...
And you are Christ’s ...
He is God’s. The Cross
makes Him God’s.”*

Paul Tillich, The New Being

And out of this foolishness we win the wisdom to use what is ours, the wisdom of the world, even philosophy. If it be unbroken, it controls us. If it be broken, it is ours. “Broken” does not mean reduced or emaciated or controlled, but it means undercut in its idolatric claim.

Paul’s courage in affirming everything given, his openness towards the world, his sovereignty towards life should put to shame each of us as well as all our Churches. We are afraid to accept what is given to us; we are in compulsive self-seclusion towards our world, we try to escape life instead of controlling it. We do not behave as if everything were ours. And the Churches do so even less. The reason for this is that we and our Churches do not know as Paul did **what it means to be Christ’s and because of being Christ’s, to be God’s.**¹

¹ Paul Tillich, *The New Being*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 110-13.

AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCHES

THE SECOND ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED



His Only Son, Our Lord

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Small Catechism: The Creed, The Second Article: On Redemption, **Book of Concord**.

Luther writes in his Small Catechism these words as an explanation to the second paragraph of the Creed having to do with Jesus Christ, God the Father's only Son, our Lord.

"I believe that Jesus Christ – true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary – is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, saved me at great cost from sin, death, and the power of the devil – not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

THIS IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE"

("The Small Catechism," by Martin Luther In Contemporary English. APH, B of P of LCA, CPH, 1960)

"Who, me, a sinner?"

All the while the Christian message is for the sinner, the Old Adam or Old Eve in us struggles against that very message. Who, me, a sinner? We may accept the idea in theory but in fact reject it. For example, let a person tell us we are a sinner and we innately rebel against the notion. We find it so hard, almost impossible to immediately embrace the comment of the other and reply, "Well, of course, I am. I'm the chief of sinners. No one is worse than I. Not even Adolf Hitler."

I am reminded of a dear friend of mine whose fellowship I had the honor of having for some 31 years. In that time I had the joy of conversing with him about

AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCHES

THE SECOND ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

Christ and our inability to do the good because “free will” is just an illusion put to us by the Evil One. In the latter years of his life he found a quote that come to mean so much to him that when he was buried the family had the words cut into the family stone at the gravesite. He would invariably mention it in every conversation that we had and in most conversation he had with anyone else.

“I’m no better than the worst; but I’m no worse than the best.”

That is a remarkable expression of how it is for the one saying it and at the same time it is a remarkable put down and humiliation to all of humanity for its arrogance about who it is and how good it dreams itself to be. It exposes the lie by which the human race lives.

It is no wonder that people are so offended when someone in their midst admits to being the Chief of Sinners. This kind of honesty exposes the elephant in the room and puts enormous pressure on everyone else to “pony up.”

Our society says, “Everyone is entitled to believe what they will.” Nothing could be further from the truth. There is no freedom of speech when one declares about him or herself that they are the chief of sinners. Only those who know the same truth by the work of the Holy Spirit will resonate with this. All others will bristle at those words.

So be it. It is part of the price we pay for being “In CHRIST a new creature.”

“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person”

As Luther wrote, *He has redeemed me a LOST AND CONDEMNED PERSON, SAVED me at great cost from sin, death, and the power of the Devil...*”

The Old Adam/Eve in us wants to put Christ and his death outside of us so that we can contemplate it, like an idea to think about. This is why the popular image of Christ’s death is a vicarious one. It is the idea that

the Father is angry with us for sinning, breaking the Ten Commandments and demands a perfect sacrifice. The only perfect sacrifice acceptable to the Father is the death of His Son. So Jesus dies for our sins as that perfect sacrifice thus fulfilling the absolute demands of the Law. We are not directly involved in all this. And the result is that the Law, the Ten Commandments, reign supreme and continue to do so.

This flies in the face of the message of the Scriptures and becomes nothing but an escape clause for the Old Adam/Eve to continue to live on.

“We are Caught in the Act”

Paul writes, “For if while we were ENEMIES we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10). Gerhard Forde, in his paper, “Caught in the Act,” writes that you and I are the ones who crucified Jesus. We are responsible. We did it because Jesus kept forgiving everybody and we just can’t stand that. OK for him to forgive Me. But to forgive everybody, which includes my enemy, is just too much to take. After all what kind of world would it be if all were forgiven? We must stop this kind of insanity! So the only thing to do is to kill him.

And it is precisely at that moment that everything falls apart for us. Jesus defeats us at the cross by declaring, “Father forgive them...” and then he pulls us right up onto the cross with him and we are co-crucified. We die with Him. We are buried with Him. And as He rose again, we too are given a new life! Amazing as it sounds, this new life is the very life of the one we murdered. Jesus Christ Himself. It all happened in our baptism!

If this comes as a surprise to you, well, you are not alone. It was also the case with many early Christians, as Paul writes, “DO YOU NOT KNOW that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?...We know our old self (the Old Adam/Eve) was CRUCIFIED with him...”(Romans 6:3-4ff).

AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCHES

THE SECOND ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

There is no escape for the Old Adam/Eve. There is no vicarious atonement. There is no opportunity for standing apart and contemplating what this might mean. Rather "We are Caught in the Act." We are put to death! Now Christ lives in us.

So Paul writes, "I don't live any longer! IT is CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME!" (Galatians 2:19-20) Again, "For you are dead and your life is now hidden with CHRIST IN GOD. When CHRIST, WHO IS OUR LIFE, appears...."(Colossians 3:3-4).

Paul describes it this way in II Corinthians 5:14ff:

"Christ's love for us controls us for we are convinced that one died for all (Christ) therefore ALL (you and I included) HAVE DIED! He died for all that those who live MIGHT LIVE no longer for themselves but FOR HIM who for their sake died and rose again..."

Luther echoes those words as quoted at the top of this presentation: "I may live under Him in his kingdom and serve Him...."

There is NO MORE to be done. Christ is your Life!

The whole issue of your salvation is done and finished. It's all over. There is NO MORE to be done. Justification and Sanctification cannot be separated. They are all one. The Law has come to an end in Christ. As Paul writes, "Christ is the end of the LAW" (Romans 10:4). "...now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6). CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW and YOUR LIFE is now hid with Christ in God. CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE!

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AUGSBURG GATHERING

The 9th Annual Augsburg Gathering
at
Saint Paul's Lutheran Church
El Paso, Texas

(915) 533-0201 ✕ (915) 238-9000

ALC Annual Convention

Rock of Ages

Matthew 16:13-23

July 26 - 28, 2009

Keynote Speakers:

Dr. Roy A. Harrisville, Jr.

Rev. Dick Smith

National ALCW Meeting

July 26, 2009

ALC Chaplains Annual Theological Conference

July 29, 2009

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church

1000 Montana Avenue ✕ El Paso, TX 79902-3031

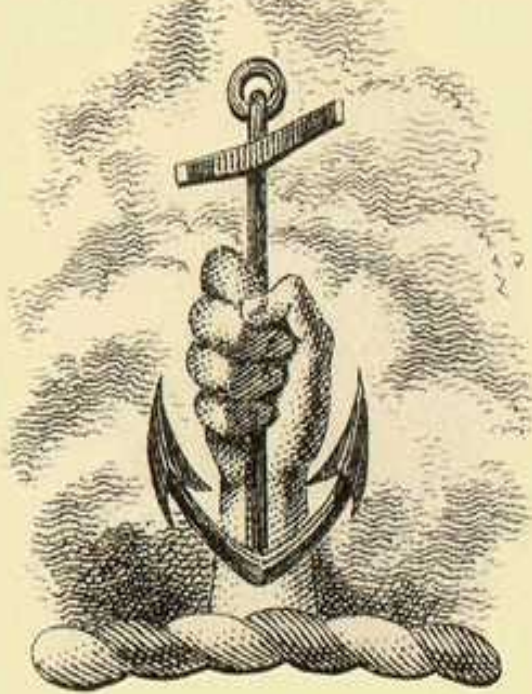
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ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

Credo

ALC Youth Leadership Retreat
June 10-13, 2009



Heart Ranch – West Texas

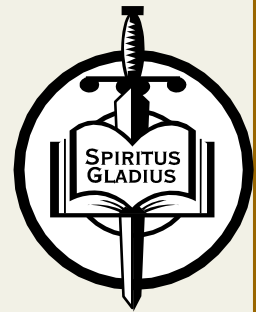
Article 3

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Lutherans are called "3rd Article Christians" but, "What does this mean?"

**Join us at the Heart Ranch
this summer and find out!**

Experience the wonders of God's creation and His gifts of Christ and His Holy Spirit. Come and discover a whole New Life as the Holy Spirit calls you through the Gospel and sets you free in Christ for all eternity.



THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 20 - 21, 2009 — Augsburg Council Meeting at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church—El Paso, Texas.

February 21-22, 2009 — Theologian in Residence: Dr. James A. Nestingen at St. Paul's Lutheran—El Paso, Texas.

June 10 - 13, 2009 — **CREDO: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT** — the 6th ALC Youth Leadership Retreat at the Heart Ranch in the Davis Mountains of West Texas.

9th Annual Augsburg Gathering—hosted by Saint Paul's Lutheran Church - 1000 Montana Avenue, El Paso, TX.

July 26, 2009 — ALCW Meeting — the 3rd National ALCW meeting hosted by Saint Paul's ALCW.

July 26 - 28, 2009 — **ROCK OF AGES!** The 9th Annual ALC Convention. Keynote Speakers: *Dr. Roy A. Harrisville, Jr. and Rev. Dick Smith.*

July 29, 2009 — Annual ALC Chaplains Theological Conference

We're always happy to print news and photos from our member churches and chapters in "The Crux of the Matter." Please send news articles and photos to Pastor Lenae Rasmussen by email <pastorlenae@gmail.com>.

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THE CROSS ALONE
IS OUR THEOLOGY

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

VIEWPOINT

Page 8

Worship

by Lenae Rasmussen

Luther wrote, "The words 'I am thy God' are the standard and measure of everything that can be said about worship" (WA 18, 69). All too often God's creatures forget that the First Commandment is the basic foundation for Christian faith and worship. Because a person's picture of God determines his concept of worship, faith is the very essence of worship, i.e., we worship what or who we believe in and not something else. Thus our idea of worship must begin with the First Commandment lest we worship something other than God, which would be unbelief and idolatry by definition. Here again Luther's either/or comes into play: Man either engages in worship or idolatry; there is no middle ground. We either worship the God who is "our God"—the One who raised Christ from the dead—and live in fellowship with Him, or we distrust Him and turn to our own devices. The first is worship, the latter idolatry. "Thus the problem of worship hinges on two questions: Who is the God who speaks to us in the First Commandment? And how should that commandment be fulfilled?" (Vajta, 3).

Luther's answer to these questions came from the Pauline proclamation that God has acted for us in Christ. Our salvation is rooted in Jesus' death on the Cross for our sins, and our hope rests in His resurrection from the dead and promise of eternal life. God acts for us and is *our* God because He sent Christ into the world to save us (John 3:16-7). Indeed, God is *our God* and continues to act for us today in the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. As with prayer, the foundation for worship is found in the *command* for us to *receive* these blessings by faith. Hence we truly worship God when we gather to hear His Word and receive His gifts of the Spirit—faith and its fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, forbearance and self control (Gal 5:22-3).

