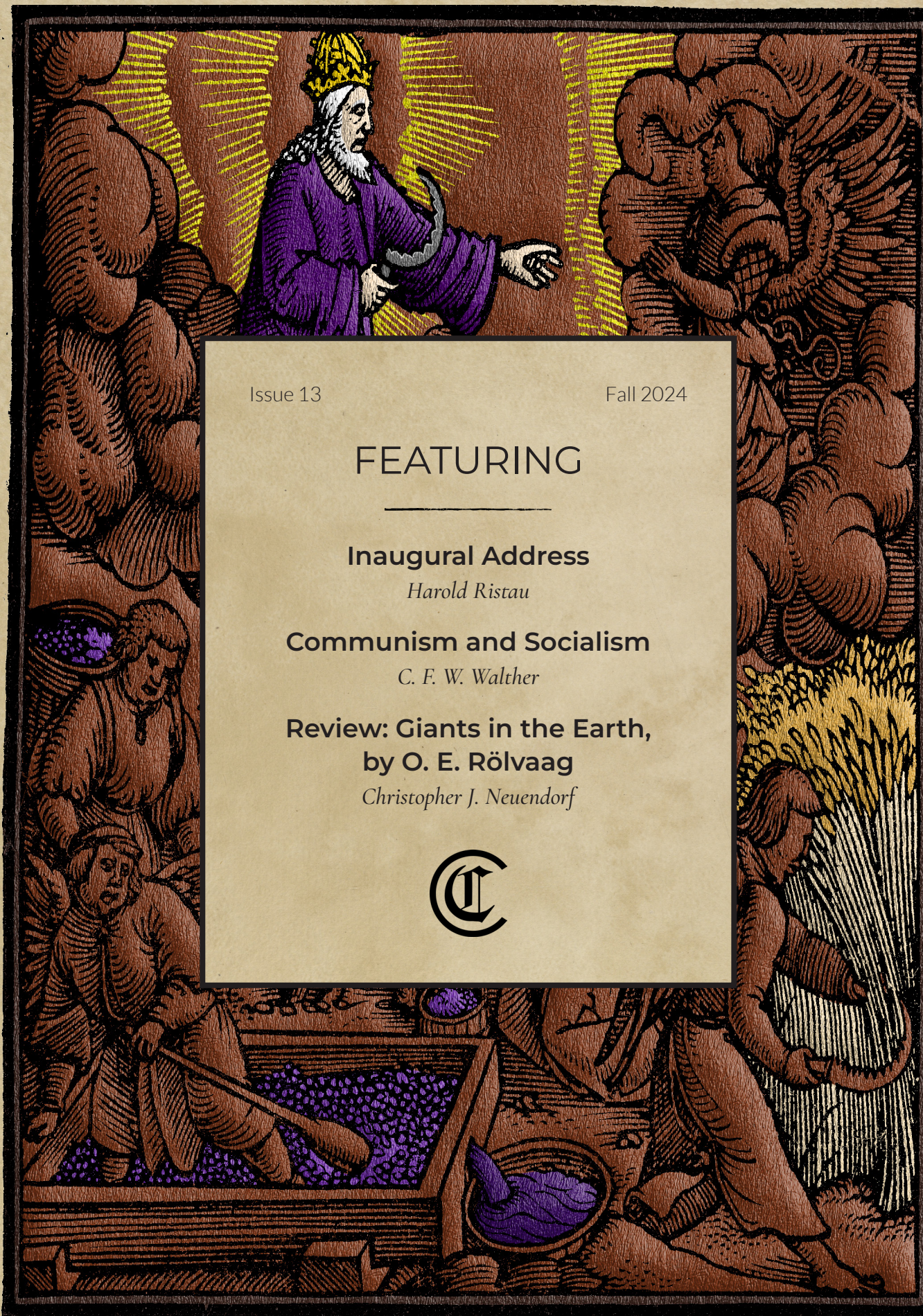


# Christian Culture

A MAGAZINE  
FOR LUTHERANS



Issue 13

Fall 2024

## FEATURING

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### Inaugural Address

*Harold Ristau*

### Communism and Socialism

*C. F. W. Walther*

### Review: Giants in the Earth,

by O. E. Rølvaag

*Christopher J. Neuendorf*



# Letter from the Editor



The Blessed Solomon writes, Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips (Prov. 27:2). The Rev. Andy Richard has served as Lead Editor of Christian Culture Magazine since its inception in 2021. Along with other content editors, Rev. Richard has labored faithfully, doing the work that will now be distributed among three men. For the tireless time he has put into the magazine, crafting a faithful, courageous, beautiful, and God-pleasing publication, he is worthy of praise and gratitude from the Church, for She has benefited from his quiet labor, without which this Confessional Lutheran publication would not be what it is today. Give thanks, therefore, to our gracious Lord for the labor of Rev. Richard, who has striven according to God's working, which He has worked in him mightily (Col. 1:29). Additionally, God be praised that Rev. Richard, along with Revs. Christian Preus, John Henry, and Mark Preus, will continue as a content editor for future issues of the magazine.

Mr. Asa Hoffman, who also serves Luther Classical College as an Advancement Officer, now serves the publication as Managing Editor. Mr. Alex Schulz now serves the magazine in the oversight of the magazine's layout. And I, the Rev. Marcus Williams, now serve Christian Culture Magazine as Lead Editor.

With much thanks to God, as well as the Rev. Dr. Christian Preus, the Rev. Dr. Pres. Harold Ristau, and Dr. Ryan MacPherson, I was humbled to accept the position of Lead Editor for Christian Culture Magazine. I, likewise, pray that I will be able to carry on the faithful and exceptional labor of Rev. Richard so that this publication continues in the purpose for which it was first proposed: namely, to serve as a Confessional Lutheran resource that cultivates in faithful Christians that which, according to God's precious Word, are true, good, and beautiful, even as they sojourn through a degenerate pseudo-culture; that the magazine would give rich hymnody in place of the world's noise, beautiful art in place of the world's diabolic iconography, and sound wisdom in place of hell-bound foolishness, so that faithful Christians would be equipped to fight the good fight of the faith and be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in them.

I serve as Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church

in Hayden, ID. Together with my wife, Jill, I have five children. We also joyfully anticipate our sixth child in the first part of the new year. I ask the prayers of the faithful, not only as I labor in my God-given vocations of husband, father, and Pastor, but as I take up the task of Christian Culture Magazine's Lead Editor. Whatever in it is worthy of praise, to Christ be the glory. Whatever in it represents shortcomings, I gladly accept as my own fault. May God the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, grant more years to and many blessings through Christian Culture Magazine.

To Christ be all the glory. Amen. ☩



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*Rev. Marcus Williams is the Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church in Hayden, ID.*

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# Inaugural Address

*This address was delivered by Luther Classical College President Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau at his inauguration ceremony on October 6, 2024, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Casper, WY.*



He Lord be with you! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, friends of LCC, students and parents, and distinguished guests. Thank you for joining us here today at this unique presidential inauguration. *Unique*, because it's the first for Luther Classical College. *Unique*, because we aren't teaching any classes (we don't open our doors until 2025). It's also unique because it's, well, brand new. When was the last time you heard about the construction of a new college? Actually, with a college closing every week, who needs a new one, and why would anyone even dare to start one? And in Casper, Wyoming, of all places? Before I moved here from Africa, I had to find this place on a map.

Because of all these valid questions, we at LCC have become the talk of the town. But we're not just drawing a great deal of attention. We're also generating a lot of

attraction. So what's the appeal? The incredible interest and support in and for this school from all over America demonstrates that we are meeting a genuine and unique need. And what is it that we are doing new?

Nothing.

Nothing?

Nothing.

Well, nothing really new when it comes to the history of education, prior to, say, a couple of hundred years ago. Unfortunately, the state of classical and Biblically-grounded post-secondary education can be likened to a buried, hidden treasure. We at LCC are rediscovering, resurrecting, and celebrating this marvelous possession of the Church, as expressed in our mission statement: "Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage." Since we are a *confessionally Lutheran classical* college, we are a one-of-a-kind American college.

Although many methods of education compete for at-



***At LCC, our students will be surrounded by colleagues and professors who support the moral values, worship practices, and belief system passed on to them by their pious parents and pastors. They won't be tempted to doubt basic truths that have stood the test of time, or facts supported by true science and real history.***

tion these days, the number of people of all ages who are convinced of the superior merits of the classical model and the necessity of restoring this requisite treasure to our youth is growing exponentially.

Now, usually the inauguration of a new president follows the departure of another. The baton, or in this case, the coin, is passed on, symbolizing that the new president now builds off of the legacy of others before him. But I don't have that luxury. Or do I? This school would not have been possible without the devotion of Christian families who identified an essential need in education years ago.

Immeasurable time and energy have already been invested into building this new college. I don't even get to set the tone. Thanks be to God that a beautiful song was composed well before I arrived. I get to tap into heavenly sounds that already flow from every chamber of the life of this college, namely from the symphony of leaders, patrons, faculty, staff, and supporting congregations. Yet, even they can't take the credit. They echo the masterful music from an orchestra stretching far back into the depths of Western civilization. For not only are the strongest schools a product of collaborative efforts, but a classical school's strength is that it isn't really doing anything new. It's not claiming to sing a new song. Our mission is simple. Our vision is clear. Neither is new. Today's conference program, like many of our promotional materials, simply states: "Lutheran, Classical, Conservative".

And this lack of newness, lack of creativity, lack of imagination, is what parents and their children are realizing is key to wholesome, godly, and commonsense education. Just as the Gospel of Jesus Christ's atoning death

for us sinners is timeless, and just as the true catholic and apostolic Church rejects anything novel when it comes to doctrine, so too the foundation of a good, solid Christian education is as old as the Holy Scriptures themselves. There's no room for postmodernity nor her offspring—such as situational ethics, cultural relativism, and Critical Theory—within the orthodox, Christian perspective. Competing worldviews cannot be grafted together.

There's a difference, then, between education models that teach clear reasoning, like ours will, and those that encourage a second guessing of Christian truth, scientific realities, and logical patterns of thinking. When freedom of thought within the Liberal Arts happens outside of the parameters of Holy Writ, it becomes a false god, and one that undermines the very foundation upon which it stands.

At LCC, our students will be surrounded by colleagues and professors who support the moral values, worship practices, and belief system passed on to them by their pious parents and pastors. They won't be tempted to doubt basic truths that have stood the test of time, or facts supported by true science and real history. They won't be gulled into embracing the preposterous ideas fed to us by an increasingly irrational, secularized, anti-Christian, and highly-politicized culture, driven by pressure groups with such blatant and deplorable leftist agendas. Our graduates won't become the casualties of the spiritual war in which every honest Christian engages. With up to 80% of Christian youth losing their faith in college (a staggering statistic!), parents of LCC students can be assured that we are reinforcing what they have taught in their homes and what their pastors have taught in their congregations.

To reiterate, we don't see ourselves as teaching or doing anything new. Classical, Lutheran education was the norm back in the day. So if we can't demonstrate continuity with the Church and her heritage through our pedagogy, curriculum, and presuppositions and, thus, prove a *lack* of newness, our efforts are a waste of time.

So it comes as no surprise that students are eager for us to open our doors. Gap-year students have paid enrollment deposits ASAP in order to guarantee their place. One third of our targeted first year student body has already been accepted during priority admissions, 46 weeks before our start date, exceeding all expectations. Potential faculty are applying for positions that have not yet been posted. Supporting congregations are waiting in line for on-site visits. Donors continue to inquire as to how they can pitch in to the project.

But if you were to take a walk to our new site, you wouldn't see much. Nothing glorious. No buildings... yet. We don't have anything visible of which to boast. Yet the absence of eye candy hasn't diminished the appetite, nor deterred attraction to our menu, for our highly impressive curriculum is sure to become a gold standard in Academia. Our exceptional professors have already proven themselves to be world class.

But honestly, (just between us), sometimes the day to day feels like Noah building an ark, and praying that God will provide the livestock! Not that we are expecting a massive flood, but that it's a daunting project, and requires a lot of faith. Yet when you believe that it's not the vision or mission of any one person or even a community, but that of the almighty Lord Himself, you don't just cross your fingers in desperate hope for success. You approach the work with full confidence that this is the Lord's labour, as "faith is the

certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen," (Heb. 11:1).

We are small and want to keep it that way. Our size allows for affordable tuition, but, more importantly, for a healthy and effective teaching environment, where students have comfortable access to their instructors. Small student-to-professor ratio ensures that trusting relationships are nurtured, which underscore student development; whether the young person is an extrovert or an introvert, man or woman, previously classically schooled or not. Our smallness offers an invaluable opportunity to instill within

students the priority of Christian marriage, family, and piety, through both instruction and the virtuous examples of faculty, staff, and administrators, who personally cherish the Western corpus of literature, liturgy, hymnody, and heritage, as well as the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Our size means we are not trying to do a lot, but rather to do a few things well: forming church musicians, parochial school teachers, preparing men for seminaries, equipping moms and dads for wholesome family life. Our General B.A. furnishes everyone with leader-

ship skills within their various vocations. Our A.A. merges two traditions of excellence: a Liberal Arts education and a practical trade, through agreements with trade schools like Tarkio Technology Institute or Casper College. A young man can become a plumber while also studying philosophy. After all, classical conservative Christian education is essential for sharpening thinking skills, interpersonal skills, and communicative skills that every individual—regardless of career goals, sex, or age—needs in order to succeed and survive in today's complex world.

With classical education already cultivating an am-



bianche conducive to the holistic formation of the body, mind, and soul, our smallness allows us to have effective oversight of students. In fact, the building of edifying relationships between students and others occurs within the wider spiritual family of the Church. LCC is blessed by the relationship with the local Confessional Lutheran churches of Casper and the wider Wyoming community, who continue to serve as seeds of this grassroots school. The faithful members of Mount Hope and Trinity will grow into the mentors and the spiritual fathers and mothers of the children entrusted to our care from families across North America.

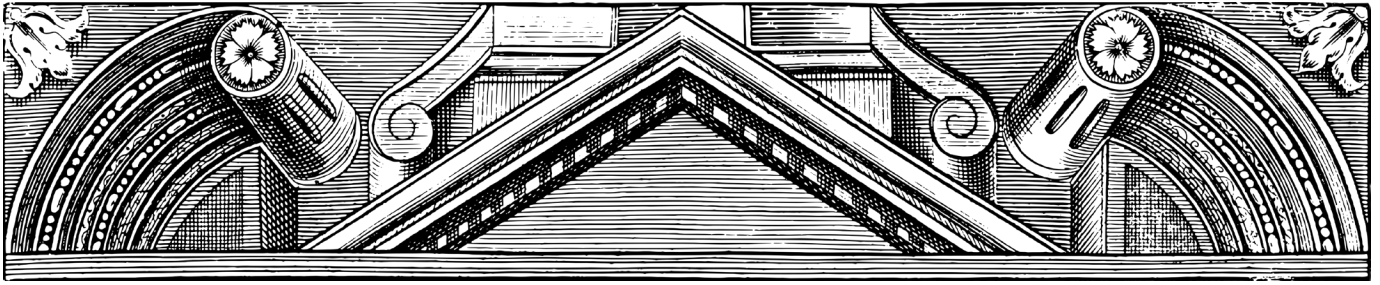
Immediately after this historic inauguration ceremony follows an ancient Vespers. When our planning committee discussed this transition, we considered how best to demarcate the academic components from the religious elements of this service, so as not to confuse any of the attendees. We found that we couldn't. Though they are theoretically two separate services, you can't help noticing the obvious overlap. And frankly, that's the way it ought to be. Make a

quick examination of the history underlying the academic traditions, and see how there are Christian fingerprints all over the place. The oldest colleges and universities of this blessed Republic were founded by the Church. The founding fathers of America believed that if establishing churches was the number one priority, schools were the second.

Today, secular colleges and universities deliberately want to erase all traces of religion, but they are so deeply embedded within education models of the West, that it's next to impossible. We Christians pray that the divine signature remains preserved on every page of human existence. God is both God of the religious and "secular" spheres of life. Similar to how the divine liturgy is an overlap of heaven and earth, as angels and archangels join us in our Sunday worship—or, rather shall we say, that we join them in an unending hymn that stretches into eternity—so too, education best serves its own purposes when it highlights its dependence upon heavenly truths and realities. In other words, when it doesn't just tolerate the Word of God, but is rooted in and stems from it.



*The oldest colleges and universities of this blessed Republic were founded by the Church. The founding fathers of America believed that if establishing churches was the number one priority, schools were the second.*



Good education is, after all, about *transmitting* a God-pleasing culture, in both content and form. So our mission seeks to *transmit* the greatest insights of the Western liberal arts tradition and Christian wisdom to the next generation. The Church's succession plan anticipates that our youth will be strengthened as confessors of the Faith, with the ability boldly to make a defense to all who ask a reason for the hope that is in them, and other means of spreading Christ's Gospel in word and deed. It's in all of our interests that we don't deprive children of what we owe them, as children of God purchased and won by our Lord's holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. As Holy Scripture says, "[That] which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing them to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done," (Psalm 78:3-4).

Dr. Martin Luther once said: "I greatly fear that the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on the young students, are wide gates to hell." Education can function as a beloved gift of God or a detestable god of man. We at LCC are not here to make students richer, or even to ensure that they successfully achieve their esteemed career goals. We aim to make men and women better lovers and worshippers of God and servants of man. It's never about self-service. Any earthly successes and wealth are only blessings when directed towards God-pleasing spiritual ends.

No wonder one of the chief founders of the LCMS, C.F.W. Walther, recognized the importance of a Christ-centered education. He writes, "The most careful cultivation of our *parochial schools* is and remains, after the public ministry, the chief means for our preservation and continuation." Unsurprisingly, Luther articulated himself similarly hundreds of years earlier: "I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God's word becomes corrupt."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, "The univer-

sities need a good, thorough reformation. I must say that, no matter whom it annoys." For "nothing could be more devilish or disastrous than unreformed universities."

Over the past four centuries, we have witnessed countless Christian institutions of higher learning drift away from their historic Christian tradition. History indicates that schools that are not intentionally anchored to biblical convictions and confessional identity will naturally drift from the Faith. As a rudder is to a ship is the Holy Scripture to a college.

During our ground-breaking ceremony a couple of months ago, a social media comment mocked, "Lutheran: they'll probably only have one book in their library," referring to the Holy Bible. At first I was annoyed. But then, after reflecting, I was delighted that we had already been typified as a solidly Biblical college. Of course we'll have thousands of books in our library, but the fact that the secularists had characterized us as Christ-centered and Biblical, was a flattering compliment.

So, whether we are characterized by our uncompromising stance on, say, creation in six twenty-four hour days, our unabashedly pro-life compassion, or our unapologetic assertion that there are only two genders, we have already earned a reputation that would have made Luther and Walther proud. With courage and humility, we stand on Lutheran convictions and unwavering commitment to the inerrant Word of God as we "earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3b)."

Now, I'm a newcomer to this community, having moved here about 6 months ago. When I first heard about the college, long before being considered for the position of president, I was thrilled as a father of 5 at the prospect of having my children apply to LCC, having given up on other options. In an attempt to find a way for a Canadian to move here so my kids could attend LCC, I said to my wife, Elise, "Maybe I can get a job there, cutting the grass or something". God works in unpredictable ways. Yet they are always good, for they manifest His love.





And, I can assure you without a doubt that what drives LCC and empowers us to bear some heavy crosses, is 100% uncompromising Christ-like *love*: Love for children, even the preborn, to whom God expects us to transmit the best of education, in helping guide them to the hand that leads them to heaven.

Many of us didn't have the opportunity to experience what these students will. But what parent doesn't want to give their children something better than what they themselves received? We have youth serving this delicious meal tonight, a smoked Prime Rib Wyoming style BBQ. These youth are not just a source of cheap labour. Their service symbolizes two things:

First, that this school is theirs! The crucifer and some of the musicians are among the first admitted students, while our choir consists of future local applicants from Mount Hope Lutheran School.

Second, that they are cognizant of the sacrifices that an older generation is making for them, with full expectation that they one day will do likewise. As imitators of Christ our Lord, it is a great joy to seize the chance to mold the minds, hearts, and lives of these precious young people, the leaders of tomorrow, in church, state and home.

It's not easy starting a new school. It's risky. Without God, we have no hope to succeed. Thankfully, it is He who has blessed us already, in accordance with His timeless vision and mission. And our sovereign Triune Lord gener-

ously chooses to work through others in building and expanding his Kingdom. He uses you and me as His means. So, thank you for your willing instrumentality! I am grateful for the partnerships we already have with our Lutheran and Christian brethren in the Church and in academia, and for all those who have put their confidence in us by their prayerful support, financial gifts, and just good ole fashioned words of encouragement.

I am honored humbly to serve Luther Classical College, and praise God for the trust invested in me by you all, as, together, we prepare our school for whatever exciting plans our merciful heavenly Father has for our small, unoriginal and, by shallow worldly standards, an insignificant school. But for those with eyes to see, who discern the signs of the times, thanks be to God that LCC is a rock that's making a refreshing splash in the sea of education.

May the grace of our Lord be with you always. 🙏

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*Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau is the President of Luther Classical College.*

#### End Notes

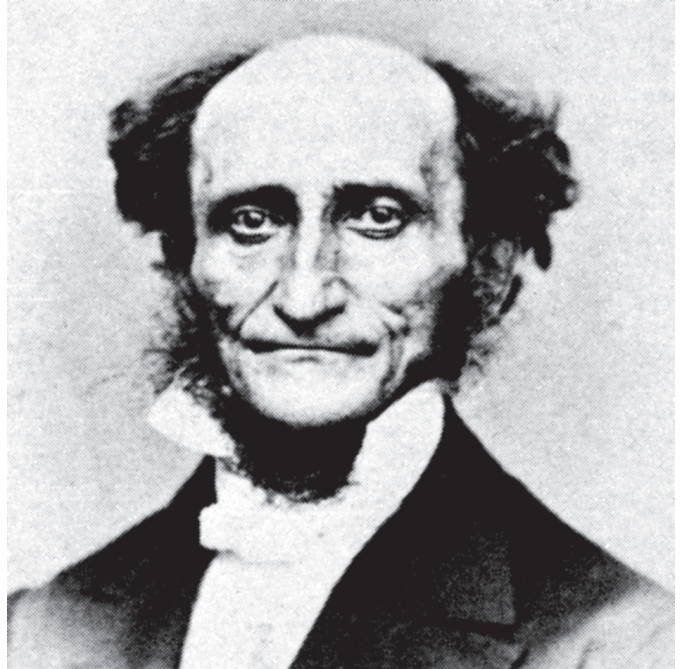
<sup>1</sup> Arthur H. Drevlow, *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther*, (Walther Press, 1987), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *To The Christian Nobility, AE 44*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 207.

# Communism and Socialism

C. F. W. Walther; translated by Rev. D. Simon, 1879

The following is an excerpt from “Communism and Socialism: minutes of the First German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, U.A.C. at Saint Louis, Missouri: a stenographic report of four lectures.” C. F. W. Walther, the first president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, delivered these lectures in response to a growing push for labor unions, both in St. Louis and nationwide, which were indoctrinating American workers into the tenets of communism and socialism. As Walther says in his first lecture, “it must be remembered that these unions are only instruments in the hands of socialists and communists, in fact, a school of the socialists.” Over four lectures, Walther pinpoints the problems with communism and socialism, upholds the truth of God’s Word, and shows that the Christian life is, at all times and under all governments, the best life to lead. The excerpt here includes the opening prayer and the latter part of Walther’s first lecture.



God, Thou has created man, originally good and happy, and placed him in a beautiful Paradise, that this might be his home. But alas! man has fallen from Thee, and because of this fall, has become a poor, wretched creature, and his life on earth has become a life of toil and trouble.

But instead of accusing himself and pleading for Thy mercy, man accuses Thee, denies the providence and government of Thy mercy, and flees from Thee in despair, or gives expression, in his heart, to the fearful words: “There is no God.”

In mercy keep us from such great blindness and sin, and enlighten our understanding, that, midst the troubles of earth, we may with deep humility, acknowledge the result of our apostasy, and govern Thou our hearts that we may not contend with Thee, our merciful Creator, but humble ourselves, in the midst of our toil and trouble, under Thy almighty hand, patiently await Thy help, and comfort ourselves with the fact, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in Thy children in the world to come.

Have mercy on the entire human race in their affliction, draw them by Thy Word to Thee, and help them out of every bodily and spiritual trouble, and open to them at last

the eternal kingdom of Thy joy and glory. Yea, do this for the sake of Jesus Christ, the common Savior of the world. Amen.

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We are opposed to the efforts of the socialists:

I. Because these efforts are contrary to reason, nature, and experience.

It is madness to think of accomplishing anything contrary to reason, nature, and experience. The heathen of old have already declared: “And if you would drive nature out of man with a pitchfork you will not accomplish it” (*Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*. [Horat, Ep. 1, 10, 24.]). Nature cannot be driven out. She has, to a certain extent, become identic with us, i.e. we ourselves are our embodied nature.

The first thing we have to consider is: 1. It is a fact that men are not equal.

There are no two things on earth absolutely identical. Of course these communists do not believe in the existence

of God; but by this they have not yet put Him out of the way. This great, almighty, omniscient God has shown that He creates nothing a second time. He has created no two things alike. There are no two leaves exactly alike; yea, not an atom can be found that would be exactly like another atom. Throughout the creation every thing differs from everything else. God is accordingly not an equalizer, but one who creates dissimilar things. Man cannot, to save his life, make two things equal. The principle that all things shall be made alike is not founded in nature. The same is evident in man. One man is a deep thinker, but has no wealth of ideas nor a prolific ingenuity; another is healthy and strong, another is an invalid; one man is particularly gifted for mental labor, another for mechanical labor; one has an inclination to this, another to something altogether different; one is naturally economical, another naturally extravagant; one is disposed to anger, another to calmness under all circumstances; one becomes angry only when put to the severest test, another burns with rage at the slightest provocation. These are only a few instances; but now consider what we ourselves have experienced with regard to the diversities of men. And to these instances can be added a great number in which the relations are of a most diversified character. It would therefore be altogether unnatural to place human society in such a condition that all would be equal.

The communists will not deny that if they would institute a communistic State, in whatever manner they might undertake to do it, they must so arrange matters that the society of man becomes an organized body. But in this there must be rulers and subjects. Therefore just as soon as they would realize their ideas, they must also begin with the extreme opposite, appoint rulers and declare to the others: "you must suffer yourselves to be governed by these."

But the communists will perhaps object to this and say that we misunderstand them. "We would not have all men equal," they say, "we only want equality in possessions, enjoyments, and the like. Otherwise we would leave man as he is."

This objection is worthless. Equality in these things presupposes mental equality. For just as soon as there is no mental equality, the communists cannot establish an equality in possessions, much less in happiness. They would have equality in possessions that all may be equally happy; but in a humanity so diversified, happiness is produced in altogether different ways. One is made happy by this means, another by that. Many a one thinks: "it would be dreadful to be in this or that man's place;" and another one thinks: "I would not be in your position." I, for example, am happy to think that I am a theologian, another one thinks,

it would be a dog-life to sit at these books from morning till evening, day after day. He would not spend his time in idleness, but this kind of work is not to his taste. There are indeed communists who say that when they shall have established such an order, they will ask each one with regard to his inclinations and talents. We would then say: "You shall do the tailoring for us all, you shall make the shoes, you shall carry on commerce, and the like." But the very thought of realizing such ideas is ludicrous. Who would then say: "I will clean out the sewers!" Who would say: "I am especially inclined to this work!" It is likely that no one would be found for such work.

Again: here is a large hospital in a communistic state. For alas! the communists cannot make men equal in health. This they should be able to accomplish first of all, for it is an essential part of universal happiness, that one man have just as good health as another. Then imagine: Here is a hospital in which there are sick, suffering with the most loathsome diseases. Day and night there is a fearful stench. A single hour in this atmosphere may cause disease. The communistic ruler would then say: "Who is inclined to go to this place and take care of the sick?" The stillness of death would be the answer. Everyone would say: "Why should it be in my place to go? There must be equality!" — and because of equality no one does anything. Is this not extreme folly? The paradise to be realized by having all things equal looks very well on paper. This, then, the socialist, believes; but only so long as they do not take into consideration the relations which would be called into existence by carrying out their principles. Their ideas are mere phantoms.

Communism paints a picture of a fool's paradise and thinks, if only all property becomes common property, then all will have equal claims upon it, and this will become a glorious world. But it is altogether overlooked that many things would be involved which would make this impossible. The communists would have all possessions equally divided. But if all have been made equal today by such division, how will it be tomorrow? One locks up his money in a drawer, another spends his for drink in a tavern and still another runs through his money at even worse places. By tomorrow the equality is again destroyed.

Infatuated communists! They well see that they are an unhappy people. They bitterly experience the wretchedness of the world and especially now in these perilous times. They experience this, but they do not consider the cause of all this. They have lost God and with Him, the noblest good; this is why they have no comfort. And now the world is to be improved, and that by means of an equalization; for they think, "there is certainly enough wealth in the

world that everyone might enjoy as much as his heart desires." But what folly! Even if everyone would agree to such arrangements, it is evident that they would soon become tired of being made equal with others.

Therefore we say in the second place: 2. It is a fact that men are naturally selfish.

The communists must admit that men will indeed never peaceably suffer themselves to be reduced to equality; they must be forced to it. But it would be contrary to their own principles, continually to force people to submit to these new arrangements. The paradise which they would establish, would then be a perfect hell; the social relations would become worse than ever. Man is selfish by nature. One whose heart has not been changed thinks of self first. Such a person will say: "I comes first, and then 'I' comes another time, and then my neighbor may have a bit of a chance." Man's heart is naturally full of envy, ambition and avarice. These are all wild beasts which abide in the natural man, and which the communist will never be able to control with his new social arrangements. Men are not satisfied with just what they need, and more than the necessities the socialists could never give. No, the majority of men want more; yes, they want a great deal, and the more they obtain the greater becomes their desire for riches. If one has gained a small amount of wealth, he is like the man who drinks the water of the sea, which never quenches his thirst, but increases it and makes it more scorching.

It is a truth which no one can deny, dreadful as it is, that man is naturally selfish, and a selfish person will not be made equal with others, unless those with whom he is to be made equal are by far his superiors. All those who are in favor of the new communist regulations for society, are in

favor of them because they expect to have their conditions improved. After considering your own experience with men, ask yourself whether you believe that many would be found who would consent to the new regulation of things, if they knew that they would thereby reduce their present circumstances? No, with the exception of a few fanatics, only those would consent to such regulations who expected to improve their condition by doing so. This is the reason why the communists can attain their desired ends in no other way than by the shedding of blood, by murder and arson.

Whenever they have aimed to accomplish anything practical they have resorted to these means. The introducers of these ideas saw at once that there was no way of accomplishing their purpose except by striking off the heads of their opponents. However, this is evidently frenzy; for although they should strike off the heads of thousands, yes, of millions, new opponents to this system would continue to make their appearance. How much blood has been shed for this cause in France already during the first revolution in the last decade of the past century! Blood flowed in streams. The beginning was made with the king; he had to be beheaded, together with his wife and daughters. They next turned upon the bishops, the priests, the wealthy, and the most eminent ministers, who had formerly assisted in ruling the land. But what was accomplished? It matters not how much blood had been spilt, thousands and thousands of secret enemies were only waiting for their deliverance from this reign of terror. Is it not terrible that those who would make the entire world happy by the establishment of a paradise must begin by shedding streams of blood? Everyone not of their opinion is put to death and frequently

**I**nfatuated communists! They well see that they are an unhappy people. They bitterly experience the wretchedness of the world and especially now in these perilous times. They experience this, but they do not consider the cause of all this. They have lost God and with Him, the noblest good; this is why they have no comfort.

with the most terrible tortures!

It is absolutely true that men are naturally selfish, and this too shows the folly of attempting to help society by means of an external equalization. Help can be secured only by removing selfishness. Then it may be accomplished. But as long as man continues in his selfishness, it is the greatest folly imaginable to attempt to make all men equal in wealth, equal in honor. —In France they even went so far as to say: “No one shall excel the other in education;” and to symbolize the idea that nothing but equality should be recognized, all the tall, slender trees had to be cut down. It was already determined that the steeples should also be torn down. And they were not without reason in doing this, because these steeples point toward a heaven, and they want nothing to do with any heaven except the one they try to have on earth.

Should a man, for example, have spent a great deal in learning his profession or trade, and then receive no more pay for his labor than one who can do no more than make use of his strong arms, he would very soon say: “I have no intention whatever of connecting myself with the communistic society.” The man who simply knows how to use his arms will, of course, say: “Yes, I would be made perfectly equal with the one who spent a number of years for the attainment of his proficiency in his profession or trade.” If all were true Christians, they would say: “I am not working for money at all, but because God has commanded it. My daily bread I expect to receive from God, since He has given me the promise, that if I labor faithfully, He will never leave me nor forsake me.” The true Christian alone is of this mind. The natural man thinks on the other hand: “Why shall I labor, when there is nothing gained by it?” How many merchants say: “Why shall I keep this or that article of goods for there is no profit in it?” Whether the goods are in demand or not, is not the question, because they are serving only themselves, —and thus we find it in every station of life. This is the selfish principle of the natural man as he is born into the world.

If, then, there is to be any help for the world, the people must become Christians, as said above. There is no other way. There are, however, many thousands of people who are called Christians, but who are not such. The communists see this and then exclaim: “What Christians? Why they are the greatest scoundrels on earth.” We must admit that it is even so, that there are many scoundrels among those who bear the Christian name, who are not worthy of the name. But when we speak of Christians we do not mean those who simply have the name, but those who do not only believe in the Bible, but who, in their life, manifest and car-

ry out the principles contained in the Bible. These alone are Christians, and if all were such Christians, we would have heaven on earth, and the cross, which we must expect, would be easy to bear. Of course no communist will believe this, because he does not know the meaning of the term Christian. He only sees the faults and sins of those who call themselves Christians and perhaps also attend church, and then exclaims: “What? Christianity shall improve the world? Are not the Christians worse than we?” And alas! we are forced to say: “O wretched communists! You are indeed fearfully offended, and woe unto him through whom this offense comes; for he hardens you and causes you to believe the more firmly that Christianity amounts to nothing. But it remains true after all, that men are naturally selfish, and they will remain selfish until they become true Christians; it is therefore madness to think of creating a world in which everyone is satisfied to have no more than others.”

We must not imagine that many who are very wealthy would be satisfied in having no more than others. To illustrate, there is a man who is worth 10,000, 100,000, 500,000 or even 1,000,000 dollars. Would he accommodate himself to such a communistic society and become a member? The communist Fourier (died 1837) attempted to carry out his communism in France and even succeeded in gathering together here and there little communistic congregations which he called Phalansteries. There 1800 to 2000 persons lived together having all things in common. There were no rulers except the so-called distributors. For someone has to give the command: “So much belongs to you and so much to another; this is your work and that is his.” But alas! money was wanting. Fourier then published a request in the papers that some wealthy person should, out of love for mankind, contribute one million dollars for this purpose. He (Fourier) would go to a certain place every day, to see whether so kind a man would come. He went to the place every day for 12 years, but no one came. All his Phalansteries became bankrupt.

These communistic gentlemen, like Fourier, are either fanatics or swindlers. We will readily believe that the leaders are mostly fanatics, because, having nothing more to do with Christianity, they have asked themselves day after day: “What can we do to elevate the deeply fallen world to happiness again?” And they have devised this plan. But what can it accomplish? People are not made happy, but unhappy by this means; and as the communists continually call the attention of the people to the dreadful condition of the world, they also more firmly fix the idea in the minds of the people: “How wretched is the world! O how unhappy! We



must take another course.” This is the poison with which the communists feed the people. This is the poison which is all the more dreadful in its effects, because we know that the condition of the world will remain the same. And if a thousand communistic papers would be published, they could not turn the world upside down, they cannot change the condition of the world. What do they gain then? No more than this, that people feel that they are unhappy. If one who is poor thinks: “I am poor and cannot follow the pace set by the rich; yet I will not care, but be contented with my condition, if I can only make an honest living” — he is a happy man as poor as he may be.

This then brings us to our third proposition: 3. It is a fact that happiness does not consist in external advantages.

Even the communist must acknowledge that outward equality would not by any means make all men happy, because the wants of the human heart are not alike. One person is happy only in this particular position; another only in that position. But he who has not yet learned these imaginary wants, who has his cup of coffee, bread, and butter for breakfast, who has a common dinner in the presence of a faithful wife and obedient children, who has potato soup for his supper, and holds his family worship, this one *not only thinks* himself happier than a king, but *in reality is*

a thousand times happier. Happiness does not dwell in palaces, it dwells in the heart. Though you give a person all the riches of the earth you will not make him happy. It is a mania, with which nearly everyone is affected, to think: “if we only had as much as others, we would be happy also.” Cares come with riches. Go from castle to castle, enter the rooms where princes and emperors dwell, and you will see how happy they are. You would find that, if Christian faith were wanting, they are unhappy notwithstanding the power, the riches and the honors which they enjoy. Happiness is not found in these things; we simply imagine it. Happiness depends upon the condition of the mind. And if you would fill a man’s house with gold and diamonds, that would never satisfy the heart. It has wants of a different character.

Even though we do make these statements, they are mostly made in vain, for people will not believe us. They say: “O, if I only had plenty of money, I would feel right happy.” They are fanatics who make such declarations. Just make an imaginary experiment with yourself and you will find that a fearful burden is placed upon your heart by becoming the owner of a large lump of gold. Gellert beautifully presents the matter in the poem called “John, the soap-maker.” He speaks of a soap boiler who sang with cheerfulness day and night. He had his daily bread and performed his work

gladly. A wealthy epicurean lived near him. He is greatly vexed at John's disturbing him in his morning sleep. He entered into a contract with John that he would give him a thousand dollars if he would stop his singing. John said to himself: "I can well afford to stop for a thousand dollars." He carried the money home. He stopped his singing, but peace and joy fled from his heart and mind. While lying in bed, if he heard a little noise, he would think: "There are thieves about!" In short, his happiness was gone. Finally he gathered up his money again and carried it back to his rich neighbor. He preferred to sing and be joyful. This is of course a fable, but it is based on the experience of millions of people. It is then, altogether contrary to nature, to try to make men happy by means of communism.

The Word of God alone can make us happy. A man may indeed succeed well in some undertaking, and become overjoyed for a time and feel himself very happy. But alas! it is only for a short time! A Christian, on the other hand, is always happy, even while weeping. And if he should be prostrated before his God, he must confess, "Happy man that I am." He knows that he has enjoyed God's goodness, he knows his tears will soon be wiped away. He will be with his God and Father and will stand before His throne forevermore, when once the delusive play on the stage of life is ended. The Christian knows this, and therefore he is happy. He is, of course, not always in a pleasant mood; sometimes he feels very sad, yes, quite frequently so; and the deeper his Christianity, the more he will be troubled with feelings of sadness, inasmuch as he notices every action of his flesh. This causes him trouble and distress. However, one thing

no one can take from him: he has a merciful God in heaven; he has found the precious pearl, and when life is at an end, he can cheerfully close his eyes, for he fears neither death nor hell, nor that "Nothing" of which the atheists are continually afraid.

Although there are many who say: "There is no God," there are really not as many atheists, even in our times, as is generally supposed. Many a one is a very bold atheist by day, but when he retires in the evening and all is dark about him, he hears a silent voice within him, saying: "There is a God after all! Or, at least, it's doubtful whether there is a God or not—and if there is a God, what will happen to me?" This voice can be silenced by nothing less than satanic obduracy and hardness of heart. An atheist may deliver a speech with glowing eloquence against the existence of a God, but we must not think that he is actually in earnest. There are many braggarts who would show their intellectual greatness by speaking against God. Then after they return to their home, they must accuse themselves and say: "What have you done!" They don't believe themselves what they have said. God has written on the heart of man and no one can erase it: "There is a God, before Him thou wilt be called to an account. He will bring thee before His judgment seat. Woe unto thee if thou hast no Savior. He will judge thee strictly in accordance with His holiness and righteousness." —

Because, then, it is a fact that happiness does not consist in external advantages, it is folly to endeavor to make men happy by means of an equalization.

**The Word of God alone can make us happy. A man may indeed succeed well in some undertaking, and become overjoyed for a time and feel himself very happy. But alas! it is only for a short time! A Christian, on the other hand, is always happy, even while weeping.**

# Review: Giants in the Earth

By O. E. Rølvaag



As one travels inland from the east coast of the United States, one finds that the earliest settlements become increasingly recent, to the point that some were founded practically within living memory. That is certainly the case in North and South Dakota, where European settlers first made their American homes a mere century and a half ago. Unlike the settlements we associate with the founding of our Republic, such as those established by English, Scottish, Dutch, and German immigrants, the Dakotas were largely settled by Russian Germans and Norwegians beginning in the 1870s. The experience of these peoples, combined with the recentness of the communities they established and the starkness of the landscape they conquered, lends a uniquely and devastatingly beautiful character to this region.

Because the cultural roots do not appear to go so deep in the Dakotas as in other regions of the country, one might easily make the mistake of viewing the Dakotas as bereft of a distinctive European culture altogether. Nothing could be further from the truth. Enter O. E. Rølvaag, whose novel *Giants in the Earth* (1924–1925) brings an old-world perspective to bear on the experience of the Norwegian pioneers who undertook the herculean task of carving an existence out of the terrifyingly new and unfamiliar world of the northern Great Plains.

Rølvaag was born 1876 in Norway, immigrating to the United States in 1896 to try his hand at farming, then pursuing an education and finally taking up a teaching position at St. Olaf College in 1906. Rølvaag wrote for a Norwegian public, but *Giants in the Earth*, having met with a favorable reception in Norway, was published in English in 1927 to great acclaim. Rølvaag wrote as one who had experienced for himself the inner conflict of the immigrant, who finds himself leaving one world for another and wrestling with the problems of identity that naturally follow. He drew upon the experiences of his grandparents' generation, which a mere half-century earlier had been engaged in a harsh struggle for existence against almost supernaturally hostile forces of nature.

This understanding of the pioneer experience as a su-

pernatural conflict suffuses Rølvaag's novel. The very titles of the chapters in Book II (originally published as a stand-alone volume to complete the work in its Norwegian form) forcefully convey this: "The Power of Evil in High Places," "The Glory of the Lord," "The Great Plain Drinks the Blood of Christian Men and Is Satisfied." The title "Giants in the Earth" itself is, of course, a reference to the Nephilim of Gen. 6:4, "There were giants in the earth in those days..." (KJV). Satan himself, together with the trolls of Norwegian folklore, is a palpable presence throughout the story, not in the surface sense of a fantasy, but as a real, spiritual force making itself felt within the consciousness of the human characters.

These characters exist at two poles: The energetic, cheerful, and enterprising Per Hansa, on the one hand, and his fearful, homesick wife Beret on the other. Per and Beret, together with their three children (and a fourth on the way) and their friends and neighbors, four households in all, have immigrated from their Norwegian homeland, where Per had worked as a fisherman. They have made the harrowing trek across the Atlantic, through Canada to Wisconsin and Minnesota, and finally to the trackless wastes of southeast South Dakota, where they establish their settlement in the summer of 1873. As civilization recedes behind them to their east, Per Hansa, the embodiment of the optimistic pioneer spirit, draws vigor and sincere enjoyment from what to him is a splendid adventure, an opportunity for a new life, where he can rule a kingdom established by his own hand. Poor Beret, meanwhile, questions how human beings can live in a place like this. Once their journey ends and they begin to put down roots in what is to be their homestead, Beret continues to cope with the situation by means of a private delusion that at some point her husband and their neighbors must realize that this is no place for men to dwell. Surely they will come to their senses and return to civilization! As the realization gradually dawns that this is their permanent new life, depression and steady terror set in, making for the primary conflict of the novel: How is Per Hansa to balance his dedication to his pioneer undertakings with the need to cherish and nurture his wife, whom he genuinely loves and cares for? How can she survive in this place, so far from the home she knows,



where there is nothing even to hide behind?

It is in the context of this basic conflict that the myriad challenges arise: Wild Indians appearing out of nowhere, their intentions uncertain; unfriendly, culturally alien Irish immigrants staking competing claims to the land; harsh winters such as test the endurance even of men accustomed to life within the Arctic Circle back home in Norway; actual plagues of locusts that descend from the heavens and devour everything in sight—even paint and clothing (such locusts, or Colorado grasshoppers, really did plague the Great Plains for several years beginning in 1874). Nor are these challenges merely earthly: In the mind and heart of Beret, especially, these enemies and misfortunes are experienced as manifestations of the wrath of God, of the malice of Satan, even as the capriciousness of trolls.

Thus the challenges are resolved, not only by the courage and resilience of Per Hansa, but through the interposition of God Himself through the agency of a Lutheran minister, come from Norway to tend the scattered flocks that inhabit the new settlements. Per Hansa and his neighbors are Christians, though Per's religion seems to veer toward the conventional. They are concerned with maintaining devotion to the Lord their God, reading the Scriptures and praying together as households, and even performing an emergency baptism with fear and trembling. But in their untutored practice of their Lutheran faith, they are beset by uncertainty, and the sudden appearance of a regular minister in their midst brings a welcome opportunity to find spiritual clarity, settle troubled consciences, and enter into a more orderly, familiar pattern of corporate worship. In one memorable scene, the minister struggles to bring his sermon theme of "The Glory of the Lord" home to the hearts of his flock, gathered in Per Hansa's uncommonly fancy sod house for their first Communion service in years. Reflecting afterwards upon his supposedly failed sermon, "the minister sat immersed in a deep gloom.... 'Never before,' he thought, 'have I failed so miserably in



any service!" Meanwhile, the people themselves receive his ministry quite differently: Per Hansa's friend and neighbor Hans Olsa "had been present at the service last Sunday, had taken part in the Communion; and the longer the service had lasted the stronger and deeper had grown his felicity. He was only a common, uneducated man, and probably lacked a proper conception of the wonders the minister preached about; yet this he knew for certain, that nothing so glorious as that Communion service in Per Hansa's sod house had he ever before experienced." Not only this, but the minister's labors among this flock ultimately have the effect of delivering one of the most desperately helpless characters from the debilitating bondage of dread and devastation, granting

a new lease on life. The eternal Word of God, administered according to the old Lutheran customs of the home country, proves more than a match for the dark forces at work upon this tiny but growing immigrant community. It is not giving anything away to say that, nevertheless, the novel culminates in tragedy—but only such tragedy as to drive home the stark reality, the deep beauty, and the ultimate significance of the pioneer life as experienced by these Norwegian households.

I have recently relocated to this region, the Dakotas, surrounded by the descendants of these Norwegian settlers and their Russian German counterparts, only five generations removed from their heroic forebears. As such, I can say that, after reading *Giants in the Earth*, I now look upon this landscape and these communities with new eyes, seeing in them something ancient, grounded, and pregnant with the brutality of the struggle for existence that characterizes man in his fallen condition—a condition that can only be redeemed, then as now, by the Word of the living God. ☞

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*Rev. Christopher Neuendorf is the Pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Bottineau, ND.*

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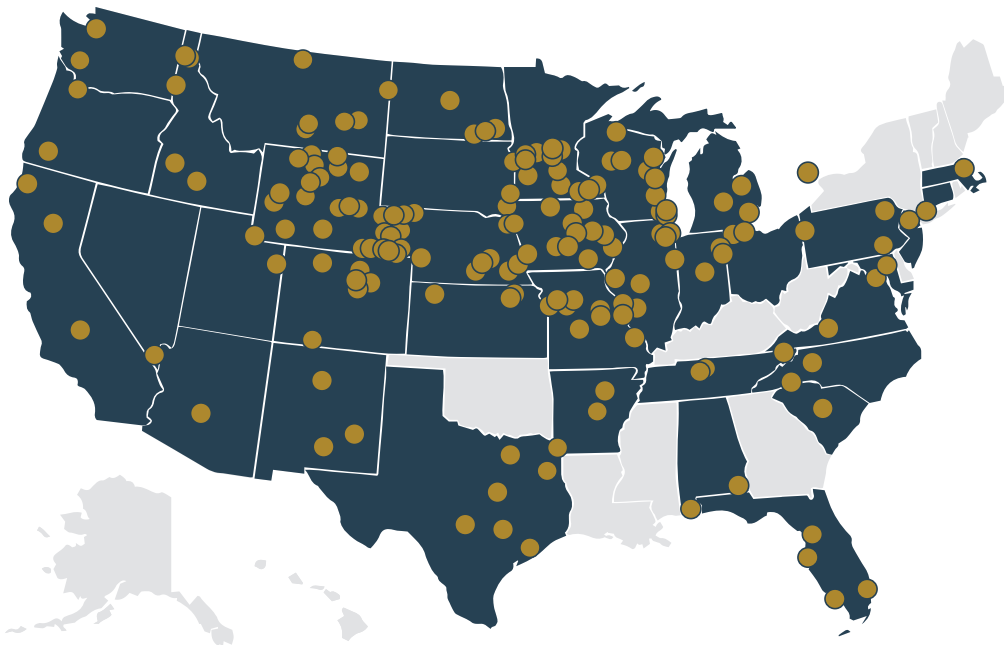


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# Lutheran, Classical, and the Power of God



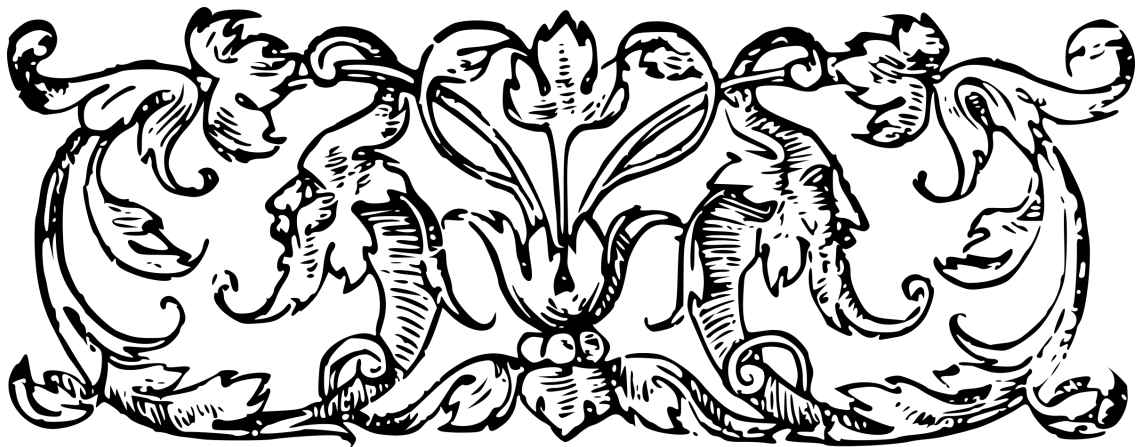
Christians have always claimed God is omnipotent; He is *omni-* (all-) *potent* (powerful). Holy Scripture testifies to this in both the Old and New Testaments. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” the heavenly visitor asks Abraham (Gen. 18:14), after Sarah laughs at his statement that she, a 90-year-old woman who has never been able to conceive, will soon bear a son. And when the angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that she is going to conceive the Son of God while remaining a virgin, he concludes, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Psalm 115:3 says simply, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” This is a very practical doctrine, because it assures us that whatever God has promised (or threatened!) to do, He *can*.

But no doctrine is so straightforward that you can’t complicate it with theoretical questions. Could God have created a world with unicorns and fire-breathing dragons, or where things fall up instead of down, or where living creatures need no sustenance? More difficult, could He have created a world where the laws of logic were fundamentally different? Could He have created a world in which theft was not a sin? Could He have redeemed the human race by another method than sending His Son to be a man and die for us?

Greek philosophy, especially its most influential branches (Platonism and Aristotelianism), tended to answer “no”

to such questions. How the world was, was how the world had to be. Thus we could reason back to how *God* has to be. To Aristotle, God was the Prime Mover, a Principle of absolute perfection that was therefore absolutely necessary, and exerted an influence on all lower things that could not be different from what it was. To the Pagan Neoplatonists, God was the One out of which all Being naturally unfolded—too perfect to have something as arbitrary as a “will” or “options.” Ancient Christianity (the Church Fathers) took a big step back from this attitude in the light of biblical revelation. They didn’t speak of God as being bound by *necessity*. They saw Him as personal, and free. So when they set out to explain His actions, they didn’t say what God *had* to do, but rather what would be *fitting* for Him to do as the all-powerful, all-good Creator and Benefactor of His people. They wanted to show how He was worthy of love and reverence. Their subject wasn’t “what God has to do,” but rather, “how we should think about what He does.”

In the Middle Ages, the Scholastic theologians organized this question by distinguishing between two different kinds of divine power: *potentia absoluta* (absolute power) and *potentia ordinata* (ordained power). The former category is everything God *could have* done, and the latter is everything He has decided actually to do. This distinction allowed them to trace the creation back to the Creator, and discover Him as the Source of all things, like the Platonists and Aristotelians, but at the same time to assert



# A Classical education naturally favors the Realist side of the Medieval question, the heritage of Plato and Aristotle, a world that makes sense because it was created by the very Thought and Word of God Himself, the Logos who "was in the beginning with God, and... was God."

that God is *more* than what can be deduced from the world. He didn't *have* to make everything this way, or to make anything at all, for that matter. He created *freely*. And the answer to all those strange questions in the second paragraph was, "Yes, probably. He has *all* power. But that was not His *will*, so we don't have to concern ourselves with it."

Earlier Medieval Scholasticism, from Peter Lombard (died 1160) to its peak in Thomas Aquinas (died 1274), focused on explaining things rationally in the realm of the *ordained* power, making sense of the way that God had chosen to order the world, both in the order of nature (creation) and the order of grace (the work of Christ and the life of the Church). This was philosophically *Realist*, explaining how the world flows naturally from an underlying Reality in God.

Later Medieval Scholasticism, beginning with Duns Scotus (died 1308) and gathering steam with William of Ockham (died 1347), put a lot more emphasis on God's freedom, and His *absolute* power. How can you be so confident that *this* aspect of creation, or *that* aspect of morality, flows naturally from the Creator's nature, if He could have chosen to make things in a completely *different* way? This was philosophically *Nominalist*, refusing to seek for causes and rationales, and saying instead, "This is just the way He made it." Many of Martin Luther's teachers were Nominalists.

This influence made it easier for him to believe that God might create a new reality freely, just by *speaking*. For example, He might make a person righteous simply by *declaring* him righteous for the sake of Christ, instead of working with him in Purgatory for thousands of years until he was righteous on the inside, and only *then* rewarding him with Heaven. But Nominalism was dangerous. The speculations about what God *could* have done, in His *potentia absoluta*, were just as likely to undermine the Gospel as they were to free it from Realist assumptions about "justification" being

only for those who have already become *just*. William of Ockham famously claimed "that God's becoming man... was so little meaningful and necessary 'in itself' that God, if He had wished, might just as well have assumed the nature of a stone, a tree, or an ass." Surely that obscures the whole logic of the Atonement as Scripture presents it to us! It wasn't stones or donkeys that had sinned against God. The Nominalists also interpreted the need for Christ's grace as an arbitrary requirement demanded by God in His radical freedom, rather than as the necessary result of deep, inborn human sinfulness.

A *Classical* education naturally favors the Realist side of the Medieval question, the heritage of Plato and Aristotle, a world that makes sense because it was created by the very Thought and Word of God Himself, the *Logos* who "was in the beginning with God, and... was God" (John 1:1). A *Lutheran* education privileges the Word that God spoke through the prophets and through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2) over the words that gave shape to the universe, because in them we have not only the surest guide to the most important rules of the universe (God's Law), but also the forgiveness of our sins, and the promise of a *New Creation*. That emphasis falls more on the Nominalist side, but the Realist roots of *Classical Lutheran* education help to ground it in the *potentia ordinata* of God, the things He has actually done and commanded and promised, not far-flung human speculations about what *could* have been. ❧

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960) p. 148 (referring to Ockham's *Centilogium theologicum*, concl. 6).

# Sunday Schools

Translated from *Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 37:5, 1 March 1881



Under the title “Sunday Schools Actually Work Against the Church,” a correspondent of the “Lutheran and Missionary” paints the following dark picture of the nature of American Sunday Schools. We share this essay, in order that our readers see also that this danger is recognized in other circles, this danger which reveals itself in this highly regarded institution. The article reads:

This thought stands out to be sure, but it is not new. It has already suggested itself to the spirit of many. They take the work of the Sunday Schools seriously, but they are neither dazzled by the shine of popular opinion, nor do they let themselves be deceived by naked pretext or shiny appearance. They are not able to close their eyes to the evils, which are constantly unfolding in this institution. The Sunday School has become such a popular thing, that to say something against it would be regarded by many to be blasphemy. But when this quiet thought is given a chance to prove itself, one can see the different questions which Sunday School raises. One can also learn from the private conversations of serious workers in the Sunday School, who have actual and true interests in this matter of Christ, which lies on their heart. In the shiny religious school buildings which we have built, we

perceive a diseased air, which itself is poisoning the sources of religious life and stirs up the most painful fears for the future. How we clear away the evil at hand, this is a question which should grasp the attention of every true Christian and upstanding member of the church of Christ.

Two powerful elements of corruption are active in our Sunday Schools. The one is money, and the other, through which the first is also active, is the pursuit of the churches and congregations towards relevance and grandeur. The institution of Sunday School has called a gigantic business to life. The selling of books, music, newspapers, magazines, Sunday School equipment, etc. – is shockingly huge. Thousands of Sunday Schools live off these things, and they

employ the tact and cleverness of the best business talent. The goal is to have big Sunday Schools, which must be achieved above all else. The more and bigger they are, the better the business. Every congregation has the ambition to have the biggest Sunday School, and every means is employed to reach this goal. Good and wise men and women often raise objections against the means, which are often employed, in order to maintain and expand their schools. But what can they do? The congregation complains. Children also complain that their school is not popular. They complain until they feel compelled to adopt the tactics of their neighbors, so that they are able to compete with them, both in growth





and popularity. The library is filled with books, which have the most miserable art. Newspapers, printed assignments, workbooks, and touchy-feely music transform the Sunday School into a pleasant Sunday amusement. They decorate the whole matter heavily with rallies, big to-do festivals, gifts, and stage plays – until the religious tastefulness is fully corrupted, and the sincere religious atmosphere disappears in the air of applause and self-congratulations. The goal is reached. The school is big and in blossoming status. The pastor, the superintendent, and the congregation are all proud of it. Hundreds of newspapers and books are used. The music is rocking. Great sums of money are collected, and everything is trumpeted as a great success.

But what is the fruit? The young people are being trained to love the Sunday School – but not the church. If they join the church, they neglect the Divine Services, because the Sunday School formed their taste for something different. Many teachers and students pass up the Chief Service in the church during the morning, in order that they can attend the exercises of the Sunday School in the afternoon. The superintendents often feel flattered and turn a blind eye. In such manner the Sunday School is lifted above the church. And this is not surprising. The practices of the Sunday School are free-flowing and comfortable. They offer opportunity for social interaction. One doesn't have to listen to a sermon. The music is more for

recreation than anything else. The entire happening is in many ways the purest deceit. It is designed to deceive people with the thought that they are holding worship, while they are only satisfying their own self-serving preference. They amuse themselves as they play religion. When such thoughts about worship are nurtured, it is no wonder that they have an aversion to the biblical seriousness and solemnity of our uniquely Lutheran worship. It is no wonder that their worship attendance is irregular, and that they search out their natural home in the free-flowing and comfortable gatherings whose menus list the same spiritual food, with which they were fed in the Sunday School.

On the whole, the path of the Sunday School leads us towards religious practices which are free from churchly authority, preachers without ordination, congregations without a confession, without duties and without sacraments. It is high time to cease singing the praises of the Sunday Schools and once again honestly look at the type of work which happens there. And when it is possible to attempt it, root out the false principles which they spread.

A Teacher

R.L. ☞

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# Edmund Spenser - A Poet of Tradition



The Modern view of the poet emphasizes originality. Many people today have even been conditioned to think of artists and poets as radicals, political liberals, those who only use art and the imagination to push for change in society. This was not the case for the Elizabethans. The pre-Modern world understood the poet as an heir and guardian of a tradition. Storytellers, poets, and artists did not aim to create entirely new, original stories. They built on the stories that they received. Edmund Spenser exemplified this traditional way of thinking.

Spenser was born in 1552 to a middle class family in London. In 1569 he went to Cambridge and was surrounded by the two great movements of his time: Puritanism and Humanism. C.S. Lewis, an authority on Spenser, explains that the Elizabethan Puritans were primarily committed to their idea of pure church discipline and governance, while the humanists (i.e. classicists) were primarily committed to the pure style of classical Latin. The narrow focus of fervor in both groups meant that they were not often in opposition:

They were often the same people, and nearly always the same sort of people: the young men 'in the Movement', the impatient progressives demanding a 'clean sweep'. And they were united by a common (and usually ignorant) hatred for everything medieval: for scholastic philosophy, medieval Latin, romance, fairies, and chivalry.<sup>1</sup>

In 16th century England, that "radical" fervor, which so often affects the young, especially at university, was still not clamoring for something exactly new. Yet, there is a type of progressivism that imagines a "golden age" in the past and attempts to leap-frog over the intervening years.

This is progressive in the sense that it attempts to disregard or even destroy the tradition by which we have access to the past. Spenser resisted this, despite the fashion of his humanist friends, for his imagination was thoroughly captured by the images and stories received from medieval literature.<sup>2</sup>

In 1580, Spenser became secretary to the Deputy of Ireland and from this point on his profession was in service to the Crown. While his true labor in life always remained poetry, he sadly never finished his chief life's work: *The Faerie Queene*—a medieval romance, full of Christian allegory. In 1594, he was married and began to raise a family, but in 1598 the Irish rebelled against English rule, bringing personal tragedy to Spenser. "It is said (by Ben Jonson) that Spenser's third child, a baby, died in the flames. By December Spenser had contrived to reach London, carrying dispatches about the late uprising. He died, certainly in poverty, as some say actually of hunger, in January 1599."<sup>3</sup>

Edmund Spenser is a prime example of late Medieval and early Renaissance thinking. He is traditional, not original, and this can be seen in his models and styles. For example, the poems presented in this article are written in rhyme royal, stanzas of seven lines of iambic pentameter and rhyming *ababbcc*. This structure was popularized by the medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer. But Spenser shows his love of tradition even more in his use of ancient and medieval images and cosmology. This is most readily seen in the way his poetry presents the created order and the redemptive story of sin and salvation.

Spenser's *Four Hymnes*, published in 1596, are good examples of this traditional understanding. C.S. Lewis describes these poems as "substantially meditations on chivalrous, monogamous, English love, enriched with colourings from Plato... and the medieval poets."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Spenser himself explains that the first two of the four poems, hymns in honor of Love and Beauty, were written in "the





greener times of his youth” and he describes the second two poems on Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty as retractions. Lewis finds this strange as Christian theology does not condemn chaste earthly loves.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the retraction is due to his reliance on pagan mythological imagery in the early poems (although that position would not be consistent with his work in general). Or perhaps the later poems simply emphasize the desire to express the uncompromising command of the Law to love God above all things and to give thanks for the redemptive love of Christ.

The first poem, *An Hymne In Honour Of Love*, describes a traditional cosmology, received from ancient and medieval thought. While new discoveries were bringing scientific change, this older, more symbolic way of picturing the cosmos still influenced the vast majority of Elizabethan imaginations. The poem describes the created order set in place by a higher power. There is nothing random about this universe. Order is fundamental to nature at every level, even for the most basic elements. And personified Love is the ruling power that reigns over chaos, bringing order and harmony to the cosmos.

The earth, the ayre, the water,  
and the fyre,  
Then gan to raunge themselves  
in huge array,  
And with contrary forces  
to conspyre  
Each against other by all  
meanes they may,  
Threatning their owne confusion  
and decay:  
Ayre hated earth, and water  
hated fyre,  
Till Love relented their  
rebellious yre.

He then them tooke, and, tempering  
goodly well  
Their contrary dislikes with  
loved meanes,  
Did place them all in order,  
and compell  
To keepe themselves within  
their sundrie raines,  
Together linkt with adamantine  
chaines;

Yet so as that in every living wight  
They mix themselves, and shew their kindly might.

Love holds the reins on the powers of creation and everything is linked together by the chains of his order. Every thing has its proper place and can only work properly when it remains in its place. This order and chain does not imprison but rather promotes life. *An Hymne In Honour Of Love* is not an overtly Christian poem, but it is an illustration of the truth manifest-

ed in nature that even pagans can recognize. This world is a harmony, not a chaos.

The third of the *Foure Hymnes* is *An Hymne Of Heavenly Love*, and this poem does make the shift to Christian theology. C.S. Lewis argues that “Most of this poem is a straight account of the Creation, Fall, and Redemption, such as any child in a Christian family learns before he is twelve ... The truth is that the *Hymn of Heavenly Love* is a very simple, pious poem.”<sup>6</sup> In both poems, Love is the power that creates and draws together and orders the cosmos. Only in this poem of Heavenly Love do we see rightly that this Love has its beginning in God. This is the eternal communion of love within the Holy Trinity.

Before this world's  
great frame, in which

al things  
Are now containd, found any being-place,  
Ere flitting Time could wag his eyas wings  
About that mightie bound which doth embrace  
The rolling spheres, and parts their houres by  
space,  
That high eternall Powre, which now doth move  
In all these things, mov'd in it selfe by love.

The poem begins with the love that is God, hidden with-

**The poem begins  
with the love  
that is God, hidden  
within the inner  
workings of the  
Trinity, before time.  
From the eternal  
begetting of the Son  
and the procession  
of the Spirit, the  
love of God pours  
out in the creation  
of angels and men.**



in the inner workings of the Trinity, before time. From the eternal begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, the love of God pours out in the creation of angels and men. Then comes the rejection of that love by the rebellion of Satan, his angels, and mankind. From there, the poem leads us to the ultimate sacrifice of love in the incarnation and death of Christ our Redeemer. We see the love of God in action.

Out of the bosome of eternall blisse,  
In which he reigned with his glorious Syre,  
He downe descended, like a most demisse  
And abiect thrall, in fleshes fraile attyre,  
That he for him might pay sinnes deadly hyre,  
And him restore unto that happie state  
In which he stood before his haplesse fate.

In flesh at first the guilt committed was,  
Therefore in flesh it must be satisfyde;  
Nor spirit, nor angel, though they man surpas,  
Could make amends to God for mans misguyde,  
But onely man himselve, who selfe did slyde:  
So, taking flesh of sacred virgins wombe,  
For mans deare sake he did a man become.

In the next stanzas, the focus turns to the crucifixion, especially the moment of the spear piercing Christ's heart. At the same time, we are brought into the poem. Malcolm Guite, modern poet and Anglican priest, points out: "What is really piercing Christ's heart, says Spenser, is love for us! He is wounded by love for us in our woundedness... 'Love's deep wound' (a great phrase) is piercing Christ's heart, but immediately, in the next stanza, we are ourselves pierced and searched by it ('launch' means 'lance'), and that piercing is our healing."<sup>7</sup>

O huge and most unspeakeable impression  
Of Loves deep wound, that pierst the piteous hart

Of that deare Lord with so entyre affection,  
And, sharply launcing every inner part,  
Dolours of death into his soule did dart,  
Doing him die that never it deserved,  
To free his foes, that from his heast had swerved!

What hart can feel least touch of so sore launch,  
Or thought can think the depth of so deare wound?  
Whose bleeding sourse their streames yet never  
staunch,  
But stil do flow, and freshly still redownd,  
To heale the sores of sinfull soules unsound,  
And cense the guilt of that infected cryme,  
Which was enrooted in all fleshly slyme.

In response to this great love, the poem asks how we can requite Him? In the remaining stanzas, Spenser provides the answers we also find in the great hymns by Johann Heermann and Johann Franck. In "O Dearest Jesus" by Heermann, we respond to the love of God by renouncing all earthly, sinful loves:

Yet unrequited, Lord, I would not leave Thee;  
I will renounce whate'er doth vex or grieve Thee  
And quench with thoughts of Thee and prayers  
most lowly  
All fires unholy. (LSB 439:10)

In "Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness" by Franck, love is shown in obedience, and we respond with our own love for the Savior and His Sacrament:

Jesus, bread of life, I pray You,  
Let me gladly here obey You.  
By Your love I am invited,  
Be Your love with love requited. (LSB 636:8)

Spenser provides both of these responses in his poem:



But he our life hath left unto us free,  
 Free that was thrall, and blessed that was band;  
 Ne ought demaunds but that we loving bee,  
 As he himselfe hath lov'd us afore-hand,  
 And bound therto with an eternall band;  
 Him first to love that was so dearly bought,  
 And next our brethren, to his image wrought...

With all thy hart, with all thy soule and mind,  
 Thou must him love, and his beheasts embrace;  
 All other loves, with which the world doth blind  
 Weake fancies, and stirre up affections base,  
 Thou must renounce and utterly displace,  
 And give thy self unto him full and free,  
 That full and freely gave himselfe to thee.

The poem concludes with a final stanza on the promise that our love for God will change all our earthly loves, replacing them and fulfilling them, when our affections are set on things above (Col. 3:2):

Then shall thy ravisht soul inspired bee  
 With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skil,  
 And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see  
 Th'idee of his pure glorie present still  
 Before thy face, that all thy spirits shall fill  
 With sweete enagement of celestiall love,  
 Kindled through sight of those faire things above.

E.M.W. Tillyard, a Renaissance scholar who helped get

C.S. Lewis a chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, rightly pointed out that in many of the Elizabethan poets like Spenser and Shakespeare: “The truth is illustrated that the poet is most individual when most orthodox and of his age.”<sup>8</sup> Poetry is not meant to be entirely original. The poet is an heir and a guardian of a tradition. He builds on the stories that he has received. In this way, he shows his real skill and talent with language. Edmund Spenser exemplified this traditional way of thinking, seen most clearly in his description of such orthodox themes: the order and harmony of creation, the threat of chaos in the rebellion and fall of the devil and mankind, and the redemption achieved by the Son of God. ☞

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#### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Edmund Spenser, 1552–99” in *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Literature* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 121–122.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 122
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 124
- <sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1954), 376.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 374
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 376
- <sup>7</sup> Malcolm Guite, *Waiting on the Word: A poem a day for Advent, Christmas & Epiphany* (Canterbury Press, 2015), 32–33.
- <sup>8</sup> E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Vintage Books), 108.

# On True Christian Friendship

J. Arndt; translated by Rev. Peter Preus



most dear, most loyal, most faithful friend, Jesus Christ, you have joined yourself to us in eternal brotherhood and friendship, and betrothed us forever to righteousness through faith.

O how unfaithful is the world! How false and dishonest is the friendship of this world, how fickle are human hearts, and how much can change when times are good. And because I am also a man and cannot do anything by my own strength, yes, and often prove to be unfaithful and a bad friend to my neighbor, I beg you now for mercy! Do not impute my disloyalty to me, do not let me receive a hypocrite's reward, as you say, "The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." But rather give me a true and loyal heart towards my friends, so that I do not forsake them in their cross and poverty, nor that I am ashamed of them. For you are not ashamed of me in my poverty and misery.

Give me also a true friend, who loves me as he loves himself, just as you also love me, my dearest and eternal friend. Give me a friend to whom I can talk, as easily as if I were talking to myself. Yes, as easily as if I were talking even to you, O faithful heart! Such a loyal friend had David in Jonathan and Hushai. How united were their hearts! And yet, alas, how the highest of all friendship and unity is within the Holy Trinity! How God became friends with men through your incarnation, O Lord Christ, and through the love of the Holy Spirit!

O Lord Christ, give me a friend who is your friend. A friend who loves you, who is one in heart, spirit, and mind with you. A friend who does not love me in word

and tongue, but in deed and in truth. A friend who takes my misery upon himself, who does not love me for the sake of wealth, honor, or fun, but from the bottom of his heart, just as you, my Lord Christ, love me. For you love me not for the sake of any benefit, but out of sincere, pure love and mercy, getting nothing in return.

Give me, O most precious friend, such a true friend, who will be of my heart and mind. A friend who will not hate me because of my infirmities, but will rather hit me and rebuke me out of love, who will heal my infirmities. Such a friend would do me as much good as if my head were anointed with oil. Give me a friend who would not tire of my cross, whose friendship would not cease, even when honor, possessions, and all temporal things are lost, even when the world despises me, shames me, and persecutes me. O what a great treasure is such a friend! O my Lord and God, let me fear you that I may have such a friend, as the Scripture says, "A person who fears the Lord can make real friendships."<sup>1</sup>

Woe to him who is alone when he falls, who is forced to try to help himself up again. Do not leave me without a friend when I fall. O Lord, my God, help me when I fall! And let me, above all things, remain forever in your everlasting love and friendship. Amen. 🙏

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sirach 6:17 quoted here as Scripture, "die Schrift"



# Birth or Death

*In contemplation that birth and death have much in common, and the Christian whom God has brought safely through the first need not fear the second.*



hough tribulation looms, I hasten on,  
For good lies at the end, so I contend  
Through dark of night to meet the coming dawn.

Yet here I lie, and how can I pretend  
In my great feebleness that I can press  
Toward anything, since I've no strength to spend?

O Lord, do Thou increase as I grow less,  
For waters round me rise, my courage flies,  
But Thou, my God, didst rescue from distress

Thy people Israel and hear their cries,  
Didst lead them through the sea, so rescue me  
And bring me out. On Thee my heart relies!

I feel the straits of my captivity.  
This place has no more room, is plunged in gloom.  
My eyes: didst Thou not make them, Lord, to see

The light of life and not the dark of doom?  
The walls are closing in and I begin  
To feel a blessed ending start to loom.

But God, what pains assault my flesh and pin  
My arms and legs down tight! I feel Thy might  
And beg Thee, Lord, to blot out all my sin,

For I am in the wrong and Thou art right.  
Yet hear me in the name of Him who came  
To bear my sin and help me in my plight.

For Jesus' sake crush not my feeble frame!  
Another pang! But no! This heavy blow  
Is not Thy wrath, but by it Thou dost aim

To do me good, and therefore, even though  
The trial does not cease, yet I have peace,  
For Thou didst make my sins as white as snow

And in Thy Son accomplished my release  
From every evil thing; thus I will cling  
To Thee in faith. Oh, grant that it increase

In this, my time of heavy laboring!  
Because Thou, Lord, art near I have no fear  
And with thanksgiving take what Thou dost bring.

O God, it hurts! But I to Thee am dear  
And I can sense that Thou art acting now,  
So Lord, have mercy! Make me to appear

Before Thee, that before Thee I may bow  
And render to Thee praise. For length of days  
I'll tell of all Thy wondrous works and how

Thou'st brought an end to all my griefs and raised  
My life up from the pit. Oh, this is it!  
The time has come. Christ, guard me in my ways!

Remind me of Thy Passion in my fit!  
Jesus, my prayer attend, my prayer attend!  
Remember that my life to Thee is knit.

Into Thy hands my spirit I commend.  
From out the dark of night I see a light!  
One final push! At last! I've reached the end


And rest me in Thine arms, enrobed in white.  
My Savior, I am Thine and Thou art mine,  
And naught shall sunder what Thou dost unite. ❧

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# American Christianity: A Nation Abandons Her Creeds

“e have no system of our own, nor of others to substitute in lieu of the reigning systems. We only aim at substituting the New Testament in lieu of every creed in existence; whether Mohammedan, Pagan, Jewish or Presbyterian. We wish to call Christians to consider that Jesus Christ has made them kings and priests to God. We neither advocate Calvinism, Arminianism, Arianism, Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Deism or Sectarianism, but New Testamentism. We wish, we cordially wish, to take the New Testament out of the abuses of the clergy, and put it into the hands of the people.” –Alexander Campbell

In the late summer of 1801, on a small ridge outside of Paris, Kentucky, a revival was beginning to burn. Barton W. Stone, then a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, had invited other local ministers, namely Presbyterian and Methodist and Baptist, to their annual communion service.

Taking its roots in the Scottish Sacrament Season, the nascent revival began as a days-long festival leading up to the celebration of Holy Communion. However, this meeting evolved into something much more unique. As the attendants gathered, word began to spread, and soon more wagons arrived. Tables were set up, preachers of various creeds would proclaim sermons,

and soon the crowd swelled to nearly 20,000.

The faithful were greeted by orators trained in the then new evangelical methods. As the spectators listened with rapt attention, some would faint, others would growl, and others would wail. Reports of tongue speaking and writhing on the ground emerged. The local public was certainly curious. While many would stand by the sides and jeer, still others took these signs as evidence that the Holy Spirit had manifested. Soon many of those attending went into other churches and meetings with the proclamation “make it like Cane Ridge!” Thus the template for revivals of the Second Great Awakening was cast. Perhaps no other event has had such an impact on the American “camp meeting” as has Cane Ridge.

A short time earlier Barton W. Stone had been exposed to fiery preaching from Methodists and other Presbyterians. He was strangely kindled by what he saw. At a time

where American Christianity was on the wane, these men seemed to be stirring the fires of the faith once more. While Barton was enraptured with such powerful preaching, the kind that could bring even grown men to weep, he began to experience angst against what he saw as a stifling influence on true Christianity. His main concern was the shackles of creeds. In particular, Stone doubted the Westminster Confession of Faith. This was the binding symbol upon which all

*The new events happening around the country were seen as something of a new Pentecost wherein all of the fetters of old Christianity would be unbound and usher in a new age of ecumenism founded only upon the New Testament.*



Presbyterian members swore.

Only a couple of years after the Cane Ridge Revival, Stone would leave the established Presbyterian Church to found the Springfield Presbytery. It only lasted for a brief time before it too was dissolved over fear of Sectarianism. The idea that creeds divide rather than unite took root quickly in the new American revival movements. The new events happening around the country were seen as something of a new Pentecost wherein all of the fetters of old Christianity would be unbound and usher in a new age of ecumenism founded only upon the New Testament.

Perhaps no character better exemplifies this spirit than Alexander Campbell. He was a Scots-Irish immigrant and the son of a Presbyterian pastor. As he grew and began to study, he applied the reason he was trained in toward the Scriptures. Soon he would disavow the Baptism of infants. His father had instilled in him an emphasis on Christian unity. This would further develop as Campbell studied. Soon he moved from a couple of Baptist associations until, eventually, he founded a group known simply as the Disciples. They were known by a few names and offshoots like Churches of Christ and Christian Churches, but some similar hallmarks ran throughout; a denial of baptism to infants, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, congregational polity, and an insistence on being Christian only. There would be no room for creeds in this movement. They believed they were restoring the practices of the ancient Christian Church. While there are certainly many other beliefs held by this group (e.g. every Sunday communion), it is Baptism that would cause the greatest controversy in American Christianity. They were beset by groups espousing the historic practice of infant baptism while also contending against Baptists who could not abide the idea that Baptism remits sins. They would gain new adherents from every side.

From his base in Bethany, WV, Campbell soon emerged as a major figure in American Christianity. He was a vigor-

ous debater and publisher. He would often write only under the skylight in his study so that he might be “illuminated by the light of heaven.” His papers, “The Christian Baptist” and “The Millennial Harbinger,” received a relatively broad circulation for their day. Note the latter name which highlights the Postmillennial eschatology so prevalent at the time. The title itself implies that a new era of Christianity had begun, one that was so successful it would herald the earthly reign of Jesus Christ.

Soon the Disciples began to draw away large numbers from established denominations. Indeed, entire congregations were won over to Campbell’s restorationist perspective. This caused many Baptists and other ministers to write vigorously in defense of their creeds and practices. Even noted Presbyterian theologian R.L. Dabney would take up the pen against Campbell and “Campbellism.” Of particular interest was the concern of the noted Baptist theologian J.P. Boyce, first president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who wrote, “playing upon the prejudices of the weak and ignorant among our people, decrying creeds and an infringement upon the rights of conscience, making a deep impression by his extensive learning and great abilities, Alexander Campbell threatened at one time the total destruction of our faith.” So mighty was the Restoration movement that it threatened to topple even the Baptists in America.

In 1832 Barton W. Stone himself joined Campbell’s movement. The union was ratified in Lexington, KY by handshake between Stone and “Raccoon” John Smith. While this was seen publicly as a tremendous leap in Christian unity, the movement would soon divide into smaller factions over particular points of doctrine. Thus today we have many varieties of Restoration-minded Christians of various doctrines and opinions.

We cannot underestimate just how fundamentally radical this movement was even from its inception. These were not the perennial Protestant debates on the subjects of

Baptism or the nature and frequency of Holy Communion. Now groups were beginning to question topics even as fundamental as the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus. Thus an era of anti-creedalism was about to become the mainstream in American Christianity. Alexander Campbell himself seemed to favor an understanding of the Godhead that sounds rather modalist. Barton W. Stone went even further and outright denied the Trinity, affirmed a subordinate view of Christ, and denied the substitutionary atonement. When one is “unburdened” by the historic creeds, then one is free to explore old heresies.

While the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement would grow, it soon factionalized and thus lost much of its momentum. Yet, the spirit of this movement continues to linger in many American congregations of any denominational or non-denominational stripe. The rallying-cry “no Creed but Christ, no book but the Bible,” so widely adopted by many Evangelical churches today, finds its origin here. Ironically, that statement itself functions as a creed.

In the few short days of the Cane Ridge Revival, we see

not only the rumblings of a reductionist ecumenical movement but also the birth pangs of later Pentecostalism. In the later union of Stone and Campbell, we see just how profound such a gesture can be on an American Christianity suffering under perhaps well-intentioned but ultimately destructive guides. Their newspapers, articles, and debates served to galvanize their opinions in the minds of many readers. And so the tyranny of the publishers would continue well into our current day.

The scope of this article cannot possibly detail the entire saga of either Stone or Campbell, but I hope it illustrates just how quickly a seemingly small undertaking like the Cane Ridge Revival, or an Ulster-Scot theologian drafting from his study in West Virginia, can have a dramatic impact on the broader American landscape. In future articles, we take a closer look at these and other figures and learn just how the creedal Christians of the era responded to them. 🐾

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# Review: *Odyssey*



In Homer's *Odyssey*, we are in the same world as we were in the *Iliad*, the subject of my last review. We have one foot in the late bronze age (c. 1200 BC), and the other in the foothills of the Greek classical era (c. 750 BC). As the two texts have come down to us, it is natural to read the *Odyssey* as the sequel to the *Iliad*. Odysseus, for whom the epic poem is named, was a major character in the *Iliad*, though not the main one. The *Odyssey* is the warrior's homeward journey, after the defeat of Troy (Ilium), back to his wife and son, Penelope and Telemachus, in Ithaca.

At the outset, after we note this continuity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we should also note the contrast, and perhaps begin to read Homer's second poem wondering what the poet is suggesting through comparison. This is what I mean: the *Iliad* was about the warrior Achilles, the power of his emotions, and what they wrought outside the walls of Troy: "Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles, murderous, doomed..."; but the *Odyssey* begins by describing its hero like this: "Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course..." So Odysseus is not driven by primal aggression toward martial glory, but rather struggles to keep a straight course toward home. And whereas Achilles was a man of rage, Odysseus is "a man of twists and turns," a phrase which describes his itinerary, but also his character. He's not so straightforward in conflict as an Achilles or a Goliath; he's rather, like his patron Athena, tactical, strategic, *cunning*.

So, whether or not Homer will give us an answer, we might at least begin to read by asking: Which is the better way of life for the bronze age warrior, or for anyone—to achieve a blaze of renown through strength and high-octane desire, or to find our way home by our wits and patient determination? In Book 11, Odysseus meets the ghost of Achilles in the underworld. Let the reader bring this question to the warrior's shade and hear what he says of glory and of home.

But we are already ahead of ourselves. Let's have the whole story, in summary.

It begins ten years after the fall of Troy. Odysseus, a warrior for the Greek side in this Trojan war, has still not returned home to his kingdom of Ithaca. This Ithacan home has fallen into a bad way in his absence. The house and lands are being eaten up by a mob of men, each vying to wed Penelope, Odysseus' wife, now assumed to be his widow. Odysseus' only son, Telemachus, has grown to young manhood and still hopes his father lives and will return.

The drama of Penelope and Telemachus, their angst and hope for Odysseus' return, her faithfulness to him and guile toward the gang of suitors, and Telemachus' own journey to find answers and help his missing father, these form an important ancillary thread of the main narrative. Standing alone, they would make a good story of themselves. As a parallel story to that of Odysseus, they enhance the tension and depth of the whole.



The missing Odysseus has been imprisoned by the nymph Calypso on her island. She's smitten with him and won't let him leave. Zeus intervenes, and she allows him to depart, only for him to fall into the hands of Poseidon, who is nursing a personal grudge. Odysseus survives a shipwreck, and is taken in by the hospitable Phaeacians in the land of Scheria. In the home of the Phaeacian king, stories are shared of the Trojan War and its aftermath, and Odysseus himself tells the story of how he came to be alone on Calypso's island.

I want to point this out specifically for those who might know some of the familiar stories about Odysseus but who are coming to Homer's text for the first time. You will not find a straightforward telling of one man's adventures. Instead, you'll work your way through interwoven layers of storytelling from many different storytellers. You'll hear from gods, from Telemachus and Penelope, from other kings and warriors, from the Phaeacian king, from prophets and bards, from the living and from the dead, from Homer himself, and from Odysseus himself. From these, you'll piece together the end of the *Iliad*, which had yet to be told. You'll learn about the fortunes of other warriors and kings after the war, about Odysseus' family history, about other stories with no connection to Odysseus but dear to the Greeks, about the loves and hates and exploits of the gods, and finally about the mediterranean adventures of Odysseus himself. These well-known stories come to us as flashbacks, as the hero's story as told by the hero himself. Here come the tales of the Land of the Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops, Circe, the Sirens, the journey to Hades, interviews with famous and infamous dead, Scylla, Charybdis, and others. My best advice to the reader is to try to enjoy the waves of story and song, to take breaks so as not to drown, and to expect nothing but "twists and turns." By the end, we and the Phaeacians are completely up to date concerning Troy, concerning the rest of the Greek world, and concerning this cagey stranger, Odysseus. It remains for us to send him on his way home and see what happens.

He arrives in his decayed kingdom, his own ruined house in Ithaca, disguised by Athena as a beggar. Here takes place a touching drama of humility and faithfulness, as the glory of Odysseus is hidden from the eyes of those who want him dead, but is revealed to servants and family, who have long pined for the advent of the true king. The faithless suitors of Penelope cannot be dealt with directly, but must be led by subterfuge to the slaughter. Odysseus wins back his home by both the strength of his arm and the sharpness of his mind. If you know the end, you'll enjoy reading it again; if not, I won't spoil it.

From the beginning of the *Odyssey*, homecoming is threatened by temptation. Impulsive action, lack of self-control, the whole array of the lower passions, and the desire for renown constantly work against Odysseus. But, higher, more sophisticated, and seemingly nobler possibilities also present themselves as alternatives to Ithaca. More than once, Odysseus could have given up the journey and settled down elsewhere to a pleasant life. At the end of his maritime adventures, he could have married the Phaeacian princess and ruled a prosperous country, but instead he chose the final step toward his devastated house, preferring to set his own home in order than to claim the abundance of a reward for which he never labored.

The *Iliad* highlighted what the Greeks called *nostos*, or the undying fame and glory achieved in life. By contrast, the *Odyssey* endorses *nostos*, that is, homecoming. As Christians, we have common ground with *nostos*, and that in a manifold sense. Obviously, Scripture is replete with teaching that describes Christian life as a journey. "The way is narrow," Jesus is "the way," and so is Christianity itself (Matt. 7:13-14, John 14:6, Acts 9:2 and others). We are "sojourners" who "here have no lasting city" but for whom "God has prepared a city" (1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13-16, 13:14). "In my Father's house are many rooms, and I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2-3). Likewise, we can easily connect the blessings of the domestic and ecclesial estates with the image of the longed-for Ithaca. The life of the congregation and of the family are both appropriate destinations for the Christian *nostos*, even if only as the tents in which we dwell on the way to the life of the world to come.

Odysseus is the "man of twists and turns." He rarely shows up on the scene wearing the truth of who he is or what he wants. He is, by turns, "Nobody," a stranger wearing your daughter's clothes, or a beggar competing out of his league. Then again, this is only true if you happen to be a cyclops, a curious Phaeacian, or a greedy suitor. But if you are Penelope, Telemachus, or Argos his dog, then every one of his side-quests, haphazard misadventures, and delays quickly resolve into a single-minded pursuit whose single goal was always perfectly straightforward. The final test against all subterfuge and disguise is that he alone, among all men, knows the secret of his marriage bed, that it is immovably fixed to the earth. By twists and turns, he has been constant in his pursuit of constancy itself. That's quite clever. 🐶

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*Athena appearing to Odysseus to reveal the Island of Ithaca by Giuseppe Bottani, 1717-1784.*



Where We Are, *Where We're Going...*



Campus horizon aerial view



Campus grading



Campus rendering

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