

Living Word: Sharper Than Any Two-Edged Sword

Edgar Krentz

The theme for this year's Institute on Liturgical Studies—"Grace Upon Grace: Living Word."—describes what should enliven and move every action among God's people. Not only doxological actions, but didactic, kerygmatic, evangelistic, parenetic—you name it, every thought and action should live in and arise out of the living word.¹ But just what is that living word? The adjective is striking, not the one we usually attach to the term "word" in either its garden variety meaning or its theological sense. Where do you find a living word? The classical answer for many is obvious: in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. And there is a great truth in that. As Luke Timothy Johnson recently put it:

The canon of Scripture is the church's working bibliography. Whatever else is read and studied by individual Christians in private, these writings are used by the assembly as such for debating and defining its identity. These are, therefore, the public document of the church. They are public in the sense that their first use is to be read aloud in worship. They are also public in the sense that their first use is to be read aloud in worship. They are also public because they offer themselves to the entire community's debate and discernment.²

As I reflected on this series of three liturgical institute themes, "Living Water," "Living Bread," and "Living Word," it struck me that baptism is the only one named in the catholic creeds. *Confiteor unum baptismum in remissionem peccatorum*. The Lord's Supper receives no mention. *Qui locutus est per prophetas*, "who spoke through the prophets," refers, I suspect, to the great figures of the Hebrew Scriptures, not to our canonical Bible. And so I repeat, just what is that living word and where do we find it? The Holy Scriptures have been the treasure of the church for centuries, for out of their words the church has drawn her faith, formed her hopes, normed her proclamation, validated her cultic actions, instructed her young, guided her life, been comforted in seasons of despair—in short, lived. CA VII reminds us that the church is there, where the Gospel is purely taught (*pure docetur*) and the sacraments celebrated *gemäß dem Evangelium*.³ That in itself is enough to make us realize that the liturgical lection of passages from the Bible is no guarantee that the worship of the church, its liturgy, or its hymnody, will be biblical. Hermann Diem's question, *Was heißt Schriftgemäß* can be transformed.⁴ When is the word so used that its use is *Schriftgemäß*? The answer is not immediately obvious! Indeed, there are times when one feels that, for all the reverence given to the Bible, for all the doughty defense of the Bible, the role and function of the Bible in the church is in trouble.

Decline and Fall of the Bible

Today when thoughtful Christians look at the church, they recognize that the Bible has become a major problem for the church, even as it seeks to use it as its basic bibliography. And there are many reasons for that. My experience as a Professor of New Testament at a Lutheran seminary in a major urban center dramatically illustrates what I mean. But what I am going to say is not an indictment of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. It is rather a reflection of currents running through much of the church catholic. There is an amazing ignorance abroad in the land of what the Bible says. Students who enter seminary can cite more lyrics from pop music than passages from the Bible. Some come who cannot recite the books of the New Testament in order. And that is not because they have not been faithful members of the church. One can no longer assume that a direct citation of the Bible, let alone an allusive tag, will awaken any response in a reader or hearer. At a time when we read more Scripture in worship than we have for years, the Bible is for many a closed, mysterious book. Attendance at adult forums where the Bible is taught engage a very small percentage of regular church attendees.

Regenstein Library, the central library of the University of Chicago, is built over former Stagg Field—where the first controlled nuclear reaction happened. It is a monument to the proliferation of knowledge in our world. Yet the more the level of general education has risen in recent years, the more the Bible is regarded as just another among many “curious tales of forgotten lore.” The university department of religion, in which the objective study of religion occurs, is one of the great levelers of religious values—and my daughters and your sons have been in such groves of academia. (I do not say this to disparage the study of religion.)

Mix into that the effect of the developing poly-religious face of American society, and the Bible seems to be one among many texts claiming “sacred scripture” status. Within walking distance of my seminary there are sacred structures in which the Golden Tablets of Joseph Smith, the inspired utterances of Mohammed—and who knows what else—serve as ultimate guides to religious life. Christianity is now one among many in the agora of religious marketing, to use a crude phrase.

Add as another ingredient the Balkanization of contemporary biblical studies. The migration of biblical interpretation from seminaries of the church and theological faculties in universities founded in the service of the church (Prague, Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Salamanca, Heidelberg, Tübingen) to departments of religion has increased the number of scholars studying the Bible today and enriched that study through cross-fertilization with many branches of humanistic and social science disciplines; it has also led to a profoundly divided methodological terrain. Biblical scholars often find that they are separated from colleagues by a wide hermeneutical gulf. Social scientific criticism, literary criticism, reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism(s)—whether classical or the “New

Rhetoric"—feminist or womanist interpretation, African-American interpretation, deconstructionist readings, liberation theology, post-modern interpretation, cultural interpretation of various stripes, plus the use of the "New Historicism" are new kids in the playground. Add to that the proliferation of conservative literalism, the continued practice of historical criticism, the Jesus seminar, and the strange readings coming out of Y2K-fueled millennial speculation and the terrain of biblical interpretation is confusing, contradictory, and, for many, threatening.

One reaction has been the growth of canonical criticism.⁵ Some people retreat into their theological foxholes; others simply disregard the Bible that seems to have no sure message any longer. Look at the shelves of any Barnes and Noble or Borders bookstore, and you will have eloquent testimony to what I have just described. All this is a symptom of the times. What the prophet foresaw has come to pass: there is a famine for the Word of God—only the people do not know they are hungry. My analysis given above suffers from one fault. It locates the problem outside the life of the church, projects it onto that amorphous construct called post-modernism, the new humanism, theological liberalism, the university—in short, whatever is out there that we can find to blame, from the educational system, the loss of public morality, the destruction of the nuclear family, the feminist movement, multiculturalism, political correctness, or even (*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*) from modern biblical criticism. And while they all certainly play a part, we have not faced the reality of the problem if we do not do our own act of confession, repentance, and reform.

A major problem in the church is the loss of biblical proclamation. There is a crisis of preaching abroad in the land—for those of us here, it must be stressed, in many Lutheran pulpits. There are many reasons for this crisis, from misunderstanding of the gospel, fundamentalist biblical legalism, or general incompetence to allowing the social or political issues of the day to take priority over the evangel of the church. But we need to add that in part it arises—dare I say it here?—from the use of the Bible in liturgy, from a sort of domestication of the scriptural voice through the liturgy.

I am a voice crying my Jeremiad in the wilderness, I know. But my function in this Liturgical Institute is to raise the cry "Back to the Bible," to "the pure and clear fountain of Israel," as the Formula of Concord calls it.⁶ I know of no way to deal with this crisis other than to recover the sense of awe before the "Living Word," to couple rigorous, disciplined, critical exegesis of the biblical text with a profound appreciative understanding of the Word as person, as lively power, as the sole power in the hands and the voice of proclaimers.⁷ That will lead to good, biblical preaching and to the renovation of some of our liturgical thinking.

Stanley Hauerwas gave a provocative title to one of his recent books: *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*.⁸ I like the title, even though I think the solution Hauerwas suggests is, at least partially, wrong. He thinks we should remove the Bible from the hands of

the laity because the Bible is such a difficult book to interpret. Given the baptismal injunction to “make disciples by baptizing and teaching” everything the Lord has commanded (Matt 28:19), we need to feed the hungry through a recovery of ongoing immersion of laity and clergy in the Scriptures. But we return to the fundamental question: “How does one preach biblically, in a manner that is *Schriftgemäß*? And how should our understanding of the Word of God, the living word, the powerful word that divides breath from spirit (ψυχή from πνεῦμα), norm our proclamation, affect the way in which we worship, help shape our worship spaces, the rites we use, the ritual and ceremonial that accompanies that rite, and all else that surrounds our praise of God? How does that Word affect the reverence and hospitality of the gathered people of God? The only way we can answer that is to turn to a consideration of the Word of God, the Words of God, and the Bible.

The Word of God and the Words of God

I begin with two New Testament citations. The first passage provided the adjective in the theme of this institute. From Heb 4:12-13: Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργῆς καὶ τομῶτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον καὶ διϊκνούμενος ἄρχι μερισμον ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος ἁρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν, καὶ κριτικὸς ἐωθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας 13 καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανὴς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνα καὶ ττρχ.

This passage ends the first major section of the book of Hebrews (1:1-4:13), all of which clarifies the manner of God's speaking by his Son. Recall Heb 1:2: “God . . . has at the end of days spoken by a son. The word spoken “by a son” is superior to the “word spoken through angels,” the *Torah* (Heb 2:1-4). The son is also superior to Moses, God's primary agent in establishing the covenant. Hebrews describes the superiority of Jesus over all others who communicated God's word. But note what else it connotes. Heb 4:12-13, in a rhetorically elevated metaphor, compares the speaking of God to an executioner's sword.⁹ It acts with power to divide, to separate things most closely tied together. And it is a judge of the ideas and the thoughts of one's heart (cf. the description of prophecy in 1 Cor 14:24-25). Recall the warning of Heb 2:1-4. Dealing with the word, hearing it or proclaiming it, is a serious thing. Any use of the word has to be done with care. Moses heard the command to put off the shoes from his feet. Armenian orthodox priests to this day take off their shoes when they go before the altar as a sign of their approach to the holy. When we deal with the word, we ought to do the same—not necessarily physically, but inwardly—since the word, the gospel, is a criterion of judgment at the throne of God. In Rom 2:16, Paul says that God will judge according to the criterion of the gospel; small wonder, since Rom 1:18 makes clear that the proclamation of the Gospel unmasks idolatry—including, possibly, liturgical idolatry. In Gal 2:14 Paul condemns Peter for action contrary to the Gospel. The living word must do its work—or it will stand in judgment over us at the ultimate court of no-appeal.

The second passage is one of the few in the New Testament that correlates ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ with worship, namely liturgy: Colossians 3:16-17. Think for a moment on that passage. Colossians sets hymnody within the genre of didactic literature. Hymns flow out of the λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; i.e. they give an account of Christ in such a way that praise of God leads to ethical actions (v.7). Hymnody is to teach and admonish, and so enable the living out of baptismal reality (cf. 2:11-12). Then psalms, hymns, and odes are called πνευματικός, coming from the Spirit, bearing the Spirit, and giving the Spirit to the community. They do that when ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ lives in people, that is, when hymnody relates the significance of Christ to life. "The Word of Christ" in this passage is not an Old Testament book, not a New Testament passage, but the witness to Christ's significance that changes people. We call that word "gospel."

The word of God is alive and powerful. But what is that word? Not the Bible, in the first instance. The Bible itself testifies to the priority of the Word to the written text. ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ is what God speaks and does. And it is the account of God and his action given in that speech and accomplished by God's speaking. Creation, according to Genesis 1, was the result of speech. The word is living because it is active, does something. κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἠὺξανεν καὶ ἔχυνεν. "According to the power of the Lord, the word grew and became strong," (Acts 19:20). That is not a narrative about the formation of the biblical canon, but a summation of the way God's power calls and gathers his people. God's word is God at work.

So it is also with the gospel, the εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ. The term εὐαγγέλιον never refers to a written text in the New Testament, but always to the proclamation of God's gracious activity in Christ. It announces that the royal rule of God is close at hand (Mark 1:14-15). It is the "power of God unto salvation," as Paul puts it in Rom 1:16, universally intended, for in this gospel the "righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη), God's saving activity, is being revealed (note the progressive present) from faith to faith, from God's fidelity to human trusting acceptance" (Rom 1:17). Track the word through 1 Thessalonians and Philipppians, letters so different in tone. In both Paul motivates activity out of the gospel. Paul uses his Bible, Moses, and the prophets, as a warrant in communicating with Jewish Christians, but he never motivates action out of his Bible. Instead he ask Christians to live according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4-5; 12-17).

The Bible of the Early Church

What role does "The Bible of the Early Church" play in the New Testament? There never was a Christian Church without a Bible.¹⁰ Though every writer in the New Testament does not cite the Old Testament,¹¹ all at some point or another refer to some aspect of the history of God's people told there. The church has lived out of these Old Testament writings ever since. When my father taught me in confirmation instruction many

years ago (1939-1941), he tailored assignments to students. I had to memorize every proof passage in the LC-MS version of the Schwan catechism¹² and a good many other biblical texts besides. The proof texts under the questions about the Word of God included two passages still regarded as *sedes doctrinae* about the Bible today: 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Timothy 3:15-27. What do they say within the situation of the first century church? And what other New Testament material is also important?

Both passages reflect inner church debates somewhere between 90-140 CE. 2 Pet 1:20-21 addresses the problem of biblical interpretation. The delay of the parousia had become a problem in the church. How does one understand prophecy correctly? It is clear from 2 Pet 3:15-16 that Paul, who has become an authority in the church(es) of 2 Peter, is being interpreted in ways the writer does not like. The same is probably true of prophetic passages in the Old Testament. In v.19 he speaks of the prophetic word as a light shining in a dark place. What is the writer's hermeneutic in the face of this problem? He argues that individualistic interpretation on one's own is wrong (v.20), because no prophecy arises through an individual's decision (v.20); rather, it is a joint project of men who spoke when taken over by a holy spirit. 2 Peter reflects the ancient idea, shared by Greeks, Roman, Jews, and church fathers alike, that inspiration occurs when the Spirit invades a person, displaces the πνεῦμα of the person, and so gives content otherwise unknown by the human agent.¹³ What is at stake here is what the writer regards as the proper interpretation of prophecy about the eschaton. He is sure that his interpretation is that of the church. In the process he moves the church into a role in biblical interpretation that will have dangerous consequence in the future—Vincent of Lerins: *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*.

The context of 2 Tim 3:15-17 is preservation of the faith in the face of dangerous teachers (v.13). The Paulinist writer introduces a form of tradition as a protection of the faith (v.14). He then adds to that the sacred letters (or writings, [τὰ] ἱερὰ γράμματα, v.15), able to make one wise toward salvation. But which are the sacred writings? The Old Testament canon was not yet firmly fixed. Luke 24:44 speaks of the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. The third part of the Hebrew canon was still under debate. In the face of this uncertainty 2 Timothy assures that every inspired passage (i.e. canonical,) will also serve Christian purposes (vv.16-17).¹⁴ There is no main verb in the Greek. I understand an ἔστιν or ἔσται before the καὶ: "is (or will be) also useful."

These are precious passages when read in historical context, giving insight into the solving of problems in the church. But the New Testament has other more important passages that describe the New Testament view of its Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures. 2 Corinthians 3 is probably the most significant, since in it Paul reflects on the proper use of the Exodus story. The chapter is devoted to documents. Vv.1-3 claim the Corinthians as Paul's letter of recommendation. Paul then introduces the "new covenant, not of the

letter, but the spirit" (v.6). That leads to a consideration of the giving of the Torah in Exodus 34, on which Paul does a Christian midrash. Moses' face shown with glory when he came down from the mountain. The children of Israel could not look at him, unless he veiled his face (vv.7-11). The ministry of the Spirit has an even greater glory. That veil lies on the Torah to the present day. Just as Moses took the veil off when he turned to the Lord, so the veil is taken off the Torah whenever one turns to the Lord (v.16). The veil is only set aside in Christ (v.14), because the Lord (Jesus) is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there the freedom of the Lord (also) is.

Look at Paul's use of the exodus story in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 to see how he carries out this view of the Old Testament. Accepting the contemporaneous Jewish midrash on Exodus, he interprets the rock that waters and protects Israel as Christ (10:4). This is more than history; it was written to admonish the Corinthians (10:11). We can ratify such an attitude by looking at some actual examples of how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. Let's begin with the master interpreter, our Lord. On the road to Emmaus he argued from the scriptures with Cleopas and his wife, as he did later the same Easter evening with the disciples. Apart from the Torah, the prophets, and the Psalms, the disciples did not understand either his passion and resurrection or their mission to the ends of the earth.

The only citation of the Old Testament in Ephesians (Ps 68:19 in 4:8) changes the Old Testament's "he received" to "he gave." The basis for the change is the resurrection (4:10). The reason for the change is to prepare for the giving of Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (4:11) for the benefit of the church.

The year of Matthew leads us to look at Matthew's use of Scripture. Consider just some of his formal citations. In 2:6 he inserts the strong negative "by no means" (οὐδ' αὐτως) into the citation from Micah 5:1, thus reversing Micah's negative evaluation of Bethlehem. He treats Hos 11:1 as a prediction of the future (2:15), though it refers to exodus in the Old Testament. In 2:23 he claims an Old Testament prediction that does not exist to justify Joseph moving his family from Bethlehem to Nazareth. In 8:17 he applies Is 53:4 to Jesus' healing miracles, not to his crucifixion (as is done in 1 Pet 2:24). Matt 21:5 omits the phrase "just and bringing salvation is he," thus turning the passage from a prediction of rescue into one supporting his coming as judge. Finally, in the conclusion to the great parable chapter, Matt 13:52 he describes the scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens (i.e. a Christian interpreter of the Old Testament) as one who brings both new and old things out of his treasury (καινὰ καὶ παλαιὰ, new in kind). There is Matthew's hermeneutics in a sentence.

Equally interesting is the non-use of the Old Testament in sections of the New. 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians never cite the Old Testament. Nor do Colossians and Philipians. The three Johanneine epistles speak of the new commandment but never cite the Old Testament. It is clear that the Old Testament writings are useful as war-

rant for interpreting Christ to those Christian communities that already accept them as word of God. The central panel of the great east window in the Chapel of the Resurrection here at Valparaiso University has two mottoes in it. The first reads ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚᾶ, "Christ conquers." (I would prefer it to have been *In hoc signo vinces*, Constantine's motto at the Milvian bridge.) The second *In luce tua, vidimus lucem*, is the motto of Valparaiso University: "In your light, we see light." A great motto—provided we ask what the light is which twice occurs in this tag.

What do we learn when we look at the concept of the Word in the New Testament itself? Surprising things. The phrase never refers to inscripturated word, but always to the *viva voce* proclamation. Goethe has a wonderfully apposite section in his *Faust*. Faust is sitting at his desk in his study in the Faustturm at Maulbronn Monastery. He opens his Greek New Testament and Goethe has him muse on what he is doing:

Wir sehnen uns nach Offenbarung,
Die nirgends würd'ger und schöner brennt
Als in dem Neuen Testament.
Mich drängt's, dem Grundtext aufzuschlagen,
Mit redlichem Gefühl einmal
Das heilige Original
In mein geliebtes Deutsch zu übertragen.
Geschrieben steht: "Im Anfang war das Wort!"
Hier stock' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,
Daß deine Feder nicht übereile!
Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?
Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!
Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,
Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.
Mir hilft der Geist! auf einmal seh' ich Rat
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat!¹⁵

Goethe was a good interpreter. The word in the Bible is Wort, Sinn, Kraft, Tat (word, sense, power, deed). John 1:1-18 is the parade example. At times the phrase means "revelation of who God is" (1 Thess 2).

Luther and the Bible

On St. Matthew's day in September of 1522 Luther published his translation of the New Testament into German. About a year and a half before the 450th anniversary of that event, I wrote a letter to the manager of Concordia Publishing House suggesting the printing of a Luther New Testament. Luther followed the tradition of writing a preface, the *argumentum*, to the entire New Testament and its separate books. I said that these prefaces were little known but deserved wide dissemination. The publisher replied that printing such a New Testament would be too expensive to sell

well but proposed publishing Luther's Prefaces to the New Testament from Vol. 35 of the American Edition, with wonderful initial letters, if I would write a short introduction to them. I did, and he did. Concordia Publishing House mailed a handsome paperback copy to every pastor in the LC-MS, a bit late to be sure, just a few weeks before the New Orleans convention.

What happened to me at the New Orleans Convention of the LC-MS in 1973 is not surprising, when I think about it. I was confronted by irate conservative pastors in the halls of the hotel; they accused me of using Luther to influence the convention to approve the historical-critical method. And they had a point. Luther is remarkably free about the Bible because he has a clear vision of what the Bible is and what it is for. He recognizes that the Gospel is oral, a word about Jesus: The Gospel does not equal the gospels, but Paul, Peter, Acts and Old Testament too, for the Gospel is oral, not written. Listen to Luther on the Gospel:¹⁷

One [p.117] should thus realize that there is only one gospel, but that is described by many apostles. Every single epistle of Paul and of Peter, as well as the Acts of the Apostles by Luke, is a gospel even though they do not record all the works and words of Christ, but one is shorter and includes less than another. There is not one of the four major gospels anyway that includes all the words and works of Christ; nor is this necessary. Gospel is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ just as happens among men when one writes a book about a king or prince, telling what he did, said and suffered in his day. Such a story can be told in various ways; one spins it out, and the other is brief. Thus the gospel is and [p.118] should be nothing else than a chronicle, a story a narrative about Christ, telling who he is, what he did, said and suffered—a subject which one describes briefly, another more fully, one this way, another that way. . . .

For at its briefest, the gospel is a discourse about Christ that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as Lord over all things. This much St. Paul takes in hand and spins out in his epistles. He bypasses all the miracles and incidents (in Christ's ministry) which are set forth in the four gospels, yet he includes the whole gospel adequately and abundantly. [He then cites Rom 1:1-4]. . . .

There you have it. The gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell. Just as there is not more than one Christ, so there is and may be no more than one gospel. Since Paul and Peter too teach nothing but Christ in the way we have just described, so their epistles can be nothing but the gospel. . . .

[p.123] But what a fine lot of tender and pious children we are! In order that we might not have to study in the Scriptures and learn Christ there, we simply regard the entire Old Testament as of no account, as done for and no longer valid. Yet it alone bears the name of Holy Scripture. And the gospel should really not be something written but a spoken word which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the Apostles have done. That is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture but gospel, meaning good news or a proclamation that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth. So we go on and make the gospel into a law book, a teaching of commandments, changing Christ into a Moses, the One who help us into simply an instructor.

Or again, Luther argues that the church is *creatura verbi*, not *creator verbi*:

For the church is born by the word of promise through faith; it is nourished and preserved by the same, that is, it is constituted by the very promise of God, not the promise of God through it.¹⁸

These Scriptures interpret themselves, says Luther. They are clear, *ut sit ipsa per sese certissima, facillima, apertissima, sui ipsius interpret omnium omnia probans, iudicans et illuminans*.¹⁹ This stress on the perspicuity of the Gospel allows Luther to criticize the Scriptures.

Christ is the Lord and not the servant; he is Lord of the Sabbath, or the law, and of all things. And the Scripture must be understood in favor of Christ and not against him. For this reason every part of Scripture must either refer to him or not be considered true Scripture. Therefore, if our opponents attempt to use the Scripture against Christ, we assert the authority of Christ against the Scripture. (*Quodsi adversarii scripturam urgerunt contra Christum, urgemus Christum contra scripturam*.)

Luther set this thesis for Nicolaus Medler to defend in his doctoral oral in 1535 (note the late date).²⁰

Indeed, Luther even argued that the gospel is the key to understanding the Old Testament—and that the New Testament was not needed, except for the hardness of our hearts. In the Epiphany sermon of 1522 Luther argued: that the Old Testament is made clear by the gospel as the Epiphany star; that in the New Testament, proclamation should be oral with a lively voice to bring to expression what is hidden in the letters, since Christ himself wrote nothing and gave no orders to write (*Darum hat Christus selbst seine Lehre nicht geschrieben, wie Mose die seine, sondern hat sie mündlich getan, auch mündlich befohlen zu tun und keinen Befehl gegeben, sie zu schreiben*); that only a few apostles wrote (Peter, Paul, John and Matthew), and James and Jude are not apostolic; and that it is not at all proper to the New Testament to write books of Christian teaching (*darum ist gar nicht neutestamentlich, Bücher zu schreiben von christlicher Lehre*). The writing of books is a mark of decline, compelled by necessity (*Dass man aber hat müssen Bücher schreiben, ist schon ein gross Abbruch und ein Gebrechen des Geistes dass es die Not erzwungen hat*).²¹

Because the Gospel is the primary *viva vox dei*, it takes priority, theologically, even to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Listen to Luther:

For more than the Lord's Supper and baptism the gospel is the single, most certain and premier symbol of the church. For only through the gospel is she conceived, formed, nourished, born, raised, pastured, clothed, ornamented, strengthened, armored, and preserved. In short: the entire life and essence of the church consists in the word of God (*breviter, tota vita et substantia Ecclesiae est in verbo dei*)—as Christ says, "Out of that word, that proceeds out of the mouth of God, the human lives." When I speak of the gospel, well, I understand by that the oral word, not the written. The Pope and the papists have extinguished it and wounded it and silenced it in the entire world. Christ, however, demanded nothing from the apostles so much and so earnestly as the proclamation of the gospel.²²

Only through the oral word (*verbum vocale*), through the oral resounding word of the gospel (*vocalis et publica vox evangelii*) does one experience where the church and the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven is. In debating with Erasmus, Luther wrote:

I grant that many passages in the Scriptures are obscure and hard to elucidate, but that is due not to the exalted nature of their subject, but to our own linguistic and grammatical ignorance; and it does not in any way prevent our knowing all the contents of Scripture. For what solemn truth can the Scripture still be concealing, not that the seals are broken, the stone rolled away from the tomb, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light—that Christ, God's Son became man, that God is three in one, that Christ suffered for us, and will reign forever. And are not these things known and sung in our streets? Take Christ from the Scriptures; what more will you find in them (*Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies*)?²³

One could multiply these citations a great deal, but perhaps one more will suffice. In 1525 Luther published a small tract titled *How Christians Should Regard Moses*. Here Luther says, "One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day." Toward the end he says, "Thus where he gives commandment, we are not to follow him except so far as he agrees with the natural Law. Moses is a teacher and doctor of the Jews. We have our own master, Christ, and he has set before us what we are to know, observe, do, and leave undone."²⁴

Luther is very free, as a result, with the Bible, because he knows his certainty lies in the Gospel, not a text. Thus he can dismiss James as not really Christian at all, regard Jude as non-apostolic because it copied from 2 Peter, reject the Revelation because it claims inspiration (which no apostle had to do), and question Hebrews' rejection of repentance for *lapsi* after baptism as being contrary to the gospel. He did not number these four among the New Testament books in the table of contents of his September Testament. The data are presented in his introductions to these four books, while his preface to the whole New Testament sets as his criterion for high respect "*was Christum treibet*," "the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salutary for you to know."²⁵ At the same time Luther did not entirely reject the Apocrypha. He translated the deuterocanonical books and included them in his 1534 first complete Bible, separating them and placing them into a section between the two Testaments. This has had a long term effect on Lutheran attitudes toward the biblical canon.²⁶

Biblical Languages and Proclamation

I have forty-five years of seminary teaching as basis for a Jeremiad, again leaning on Father Martin: the growing insouciance of pastors who

almost flaunt their intentional arrogance in disregarding the original languages of the Scriptures. Luther again:

We should hold to the languages as hard as the gospel is dear to us. For God did not arbitrarily have his Scripture written in two languages, the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. Now what (languages) God does not despise, but selects for his word above all others, we too should honor above all others.²⁷

The “learned ministerium” often seems content with a lay person’s interpretive resources. How far we have fallen from Luther’s ideal. *Sunt lacrimae rerum!* I should think that people who are specially interested in liturgy, because of their unusual appreciation of the catholic tradition, would be at the forefront of those who work to master the New Testament in Greek—especially when one considers that Greek and—dare I say it?—Latin opens one to the riches of catholic hymnody. Why is it that we no longer can speak of the *Te Deum*, the *Nunc Dimittis*, or the *Magnificat*? We have lost the “Leisen,” those classical hymns that end with *Kyrie leis*. It should begin with the study of the New Testament in Greek. One will use every tool available and “take every step” we can “to find out what God means to say to us.” That requires discipline: Charles Kingsley Barrett put it this way: “Discipline means that if I am capable of Greek I keep it up, that I consult the commentaries (and that not merely hand to mouth), that I use the concordance and the margin of the reference Bible that so far as may be I read serious books of biblical theology and criticism.”²⁸

I do understand the pressures of modern parish life, of frequent meetings, visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted, administering the parish, keeping up with the Synod, reading the many texts that come from church headquarters. But, yes, I do mean to put some Lutheran guilt on the hearts of you all out there. To stand in a pulpit and say, “Yea, God has said” without the discipline of wrestling with the texts in the languages God elected to use is an undervaluing of Scripture and an insult to the foundation texts of the faith. If for no other reason, one needs to study the Greek and Hebrew texts to know what the English Version is meant to say, and to know what English translation to read liturgically on Sunday.

Scripture and Liturgical Worship

In the face of all that one should recall gratefully the positive relationship between liturgy and the word. The rehabilitation of biblical study in the Roman church went *pari passu* with the renewal of worship, as the study of the New Testament recalled the church to biblical emphases in the sacraments, while the liturgical reading of the biblical texts recalled the importance of relating homily and the Bible. I recall the significance of Father Hellriegel up in the German Catholic section of North St. Louis called Baden, a model of liturgical renewal long before Vatican II.

The Living Word in the Community of Faith²⁹ means Liturgical Preaching. The overarching set of mind that must dominate all our wor-

ship is evangelical proclamation, making Christ known in all his fullness. Proclaim the gospel and all else gets its proper location and weight. Proclaiming the Gospel means taking the biblical texts seriously in all their specificity and variety, avoiding all lenses that shorten or blur our vision. These can take a number of forms: literalist fundamentalism, dogmatic criticism, historical criticism, a number of ideological approaches, and liturgical criticism of the biblical text.

Preaching should take its emphasis and shape from the biblical text, not from the liturgy or the morning paper. Liturgy flows from Gospel, not Gospel from liturgy. Therefore good preaching recognizes that the liturgy and the liturgical year are human inventions that should not blunt the significance of the text. For example, is 1 Cor 5:6-8 really an Easter text? It reads like an interpretation of Peshach, not Easter. Nor is the lamb in John 1 an Easter symbol—though it is in Revelation 5. Honest preaching will recognize when it is applying a text to a new context.

Charles Kingsley Barrett has a wonderful anecdote that illustrates my point. His father, a clergyman in England, invited his Methodist bishop to preach at a special parish celebration. Talking shop at dinner the night before the great day, his father and the bishop compared their respective modes of sermon preparation. "When I have found a text, I always begin by studying the context in order to make sure of its original setting and meaning," Barrett's father commented. "When I find a text," the bishop replied, "I never look up the context for fear it spoils the sermon."³⁰ Take Barrett's point: preaching which does not arise from the preacher being immersed in an entire book, in mining the significance of the original language, and in determining meaning from the textual and social/historical context, and flees instead to lectionary or liturgical context is, to put it bluntly, dishonest. The liturgical lection is not *creatura liturgiae*, but is *creator liturgiae*.

One implication of this is that we do not need to end every homily with a reference to the Table of the Lord. As one who listens to more sermons than I preach, I grow weary of the constant move to the Lord's Table in sermons. After all, the apostolic word does not do it! There are at best seven passages that refer to the Lord's Supper in the entire New Testament. If we must draw ties to liturgical experience, draw them—as the biblical texts do—to baptism. There is an under-used sacrament. The biblical understanding of Word of God, of Gospel, does not subordinate Gospel to liturgy, to Eucharist, or to hymnody. Rather, as Col 3 makes clear, hymnody is to be dominated by the λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, the account of Christ. Recall Luther's words about the Gospel. Where there is no clear *evangel* proclaimed, there is danger that *sacramentum* becomes magic. The old appellation for the Lordly Meal, *verbum visibile*, reminds us of that reality, as does Paul's word about the meal being a proclamation of the Lord's death till he comes.

The Living Word in Liturgical Practice: Ceremony and Ceremonial

And yet there are also some things that I must needs say on the other side of the ledger. For all its wonderful revitalizing of worship, unreflective practice of liturgy raises serious questions in the mind of one who is devoted both to liturgical worship and the priority of the living word to everything the church does, including worship. Liturgy and liturgiologists sometimes inhibit biblical interpretation and stand in the way of hearing the biblical texts. (I hasten to add that they by no means have a corner on this play. Exegetes themselves often get in the way.)

Liturgical use of the Scriptures is ultimately a reduction of the canon. Let me justify that somewhat grating statement. Have you ever looked through the lectionary use of the Bible to note what is not there? Or to determine how often the lection selected does not correlate with the textual units of the original book? Why does Mark 9:1 become an orphan with no home in the liturgy? Why does the lectionary end the reading of Rom 3:21 at v.28 and omit 3:29-31? Why does Rom 8:16-25 get excluded? Jude never makes it. And the Revelation of John gets very short shrift. That is a tragedy in a world where some Pentecostal and Fundamentalist sects are readying you for the next millennium. (They usually don't realize that the new millennium began, at its latest, in 1996, if you figure it from the birth of Christ! I wonder if Dionysius Exiguus is laughing in heaven over the effects of his calendar miscalculation.) I believe that good biblical proclamation demands criticism of the lectionary.

The lectionary is itself a form of biblical criticism—lectionary criticism I call it. The lectionary omits some passages that are central to the understanding of biblical texts, even when it aims at a form of *lectio continua*. Let me give one example. We pray the Matthean text of the Lord's Prayer when we worship, supplemented with the doxology from the Didache. Did it ever strike you that the Lord's Prayer shows up in Year C in its Lukan form (Luke 11:2-4), but not in its Matthean form (Matt 6:9-13) in the year of Matthew? And that is where Matthew introduces a key motif of his gospel: The forgiven must forgive to be forgiven. I would want to interpret the prayer as we actually pray it as I preach.

Without going into details, the lectionary sometimes bowdlerizes the texts it does use. The lessons from Acts in the Easter cycle carefully drop the references to Peter's shadow and Paul's sweat cloth healing people. They omit passages that might suggest some form of magic or, presumably, be difficult for a pastor to interpret. Check the omissions from Matthew 10 some time. There are other more serious omissions.

Regina Boisclair, in her Temple University dissertation titled "Proclaiming Salvation: the Hermeneutic of Six Contemporary Christian Lectionaries," pointed out that the Roman Catholic liturgiologist Adrien Nugent claims that "lectionaries establish a 'biblico-liturgical reading' that is more significant than any other reading of the Bible." By that he means, apparently, that the lections reinforce the cultural-linguistic symbols of Christianity present in the

liturgy and become, *mirabile dictu*, more significant in the liturgical context. If by that he means that the laity hear the Bible more there than elsewhere, it is both true and a judgment upon our non-use of the Bible. If he means that the Bible means more or something other than it means outside the liturgy, then liturgical hermeneutics, in my opinion, is just plain wrong.

There is also a tendency, given the use of readings from Luke in the Christmas cycle and John in the Lenten-Easter cycle, to still homogenize the gospels in the minds of the hearers, unless the pastor/proclaimer is sensitive to each gospel's unique—and sometimes contradictory—theology and narrative. I cite Boisclair: "In the lectionaries, the gospels are a hybrid between a gospel harmony and the four canonical accounts" (p.8). (I add a parenthetical comment. The lectionary has recently become the playing field for forms of politically correct hermeneutics. I am in favor of language as inclusive as the original texts allow. But it is dangerous to revise the text to remove all things that might offend people, whether one softens the anti-Semitic sounding texts in the Gospels, turns God into Father and Mother, or edits out other objectionable features—including some of the blunt language. The principle is dangerous.)

Recent liturgical practice and some liturgical language denigrate parts of the Bible. (I realize that people may respond that I am attacking a long-honored tradition in the church.) We name each of the three-year cycles after one of the Synoptic Gospels: "The Year of Matthew," we say, or Mark or Luke. The tendency to identify the gospel for a given Sunday with the third lesson (also called by the title "gospel" in an unfortunate, but irreversible use of the term) implies two things that functionally reduce the canon. First, lay people get the impression that it is the third lesson that contains the "Living Word" of the gospel for the day, effectively a form of Marcionism on the Old Testament lesson and even the post-evangel writings of the New Testament. The very title gives an unwarranted preeminence to the third lesson, based on an inadequate understanding of the biblical meaning of the term εὐαγγέλιον. That is a very un-historical approach to the Bible. Paul, Peter, and James—possibly even John—never read a gospel, though they certainly had proclaimed the living word of the Gospel. This is especially surprising among Christians who live in the afterglow of the Reformation, which flowed from a reading of Paul by Luther, or a reading of Luther's Galatians by John Wesley, not from the canonical Gospels.

Second, some liturgiologists even imply that the homily for the day should always—or usually—be based on the liturgical Gospel. Or, equally faulty, suggest that the homily should draw in all three lessons, which usually leaves me amazed at the exegetical sins perpetrated for homiletical ends because of liturgical pressure. We run the risk of teaching our people that the Gospels are more gospel than Paul or 1 Peter or Second Isaiah. Luther would scarcely recognize this position. Listen to him from his preface to the New Testament of 1522 in the section entitled "The True and Noblest Books of the New Testament":

From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought properly to be the foremost books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading to make them as much his own as his daily bread. For in them you do not find many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death and hell and give life righteousness and salvation. This is the real nature of the Gospel as you have heard. . . .

In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and Saint Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it, but more of this in the other prefaces.³¹

I should add that the lectionary is not inspired in its selections. I urge students and pastors, too, when I lead discussions of preaching in Advent or Lent (the two seasons I am usually asked to discuss) to exercise criticism on the lectionary: to extend readings to the true boundaries of a biblical text, to import sections of the book omitted by the lectionary, etc. All this assumes, of course, that the pastor is a biblical scholar, who thinks it a professional, better a proclamatory obligation, to drown herself or himself in the waters of the text, to be like Luther, who struggled with the Bible, as he said, *bis ich ein ziemlich guter textualis wurde*. This might include looking up the verse(s) omitted in a lectionary selection. Lutherans have never stressed expository preaching, that is, the running explication of an entire biblical text in a series of sermons. There are times when the lectionary invites one to do so with 1 Peter in the Easter season in Series A or Ephesians in the Pentecost Cycle in Series C. If there were pew Bibles handy, one might encourage Bible study by laity in that fashion.

And then there is the assumption, sometimes actually expressed, that the biblical text read in the context of the liturgy develops a meaning that goes beyond the sense of a passage in its true biblical context. As a biblical scholar, for example, I cringe each time I sing the Benedictus in Morning Prayer; or, to be put it more precisely, I cringe when a solo voiced celebrant sings the words "You, my child. . ." to the assembled congregation, as if it were the child. It isn't. Have we turned the community into John the Baptist, putting it back into the Old Testament, where Luke puts John the Baptist? The liturgical use at morning prayer disregards the biblical sense, assigning the part that is directly applicable to John to a solo voice without any biblical warrant. In that respect it comes close, to use a nasty phrase, to liturgical deconstructionism.

Or take the optional words after the Dominical Prayer: "Reveal yourself to us, O Lord, in the breaking of the bread, as once you revealed yourself to the disciples." I try to figure out just what passage of Scripture posits

that in relation in the Lordly Meal. Luke 24 does not apply to the Lord's Supper. Nor do the accounts of the institution of the meal in the Synoptics or 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Corinthians 10 knows nothing of Jesus' self-revelation in the Lord's Banquet. I have concluded, sadly, that the words can only be an importation from non-Christian Greek mystery religions, from the *δεικνόμενα*, and so, stand silent as these words are said each Sunday in my home parish, refusing to participate in a misinterpretation of something biblical—if I only knew what!

I am disturbed when the spirit or ethos of a service contradicts the lections that are given. Let me give one example. In my childhood we read the homogenized Passion according to the four Gospels during weekly Lenten services. That is, we read a text that is not to be found in the New Testament. In returning, partly, to the practice of reading the passion according to each Gospel as an integral unit we have made an advance—though we still have not caught up with the medieval church, which read the four on different days in Holy Week. We spread the synoptics over three years.

Each year we read John 18-19 on Good Friday.³² But does our liturgy and worship really support the Johannine text? John's passion is the story of Jesus' exaltation, not his humiliation. There is no mockery of Jesus in the Johannine passion. Pilate's evaluation of Jesus is given in the unalterable "This is the King of the Jews." Jesus last word, *τετέλεσται* is a victory cry. Bach is correct in the great alto aria "*Es ist vollbracht*" to have the trumpets accompany her as she sings "The Lion of Judah triumphs now!" His death is a handing over of the Spirit to those at the foot of the cross, the Johannine foundation of the Christian community (*παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα*). There is no cry of dereliction. In short, a Johannine Good Friday liturgy will not call for sympathy for the suffering of Jesus, but will exult in his death. It is no accident that Venantius Fortunatus' great hymn, *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, is the office hymn for Good Friday, since its fundamental outlook is Johannine. Salvador Dali caught this in his *Christ of St. John*, when he interprets the Johannine crucifixion as the Jacob's ladder of John 1:51. But we often let the tradition of mourning dominate. "O Sorrow dread, God's Son is dead." I find the omission of a homily in the Good Friday liturgy particularly bad, since in it we ought to set the proper Johannine context for that worship. *O tempora, O mores, O triduum parte tristum!*

As you might guess, I find the recovery of the so-called Triduum somewhat problematic, unless great thought is given to it. It tends to divorce the significance of Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday) from the rest of Holy Week, to divorce the ministry of Jesus from the consideration of his death, and to blur, for example, the stress of the year of Matthew on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as judgment.

I find the tendency of some preachers, encouraged I think, by liturgists to make two mistakes about the Sunday lections. Either they feel they must deal with all three in a sermon, and then do exegetical contortions to fit them all together. Or they feel that the gospel for a given day

is in the Gospel, the third lesson.³³ On many Sundays the gospel is more clearly given in the Epistle, or, *mirabile dictu*, in the Old Testament lesson than in the third lesson.

Some of these examples will surely grate on some—or all—of you. I have not expressed my great appreciation of much in the liturgy: the concern for Scripture in worship, the careful preparation for celebration, the liturgy and the lectionary as didactic masterpieces,³⁴ the Holy Week liturgy as a form of acting out the story of Jesus. But then, had I done that, there would be little stimulation to consideration of the role of the Living Word in liturgical action.

Symbolic actions in the liturgy are often of great value. I like the practice I have seen in both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic parishes of the entire congregation using the *orans* posture in prayer, both hands raised with palms open, physically showing the reality of Luther's "*Wir sind Bettler, das ist wahr!*" The gospel procession into the middle of the congregation makes clear that the gospel is for the people, but aren't the other two lessons also? The *signum crucis* at the *Benedictus qui venit* as a prayer before communing is also, for me, a valuable symbolic action. But some symbolic actions in the liturgy give me, an exegete, immense problems. Let me illustrate.

Some symbolic actions tend to support bibliolatry. J.A. Cuddon defines bibliolatry as "(Gk. 'book worship'): an excessive devotion to or reverence for a book or books. (The bibliophile (q.v.) is susceptible to it; so are worshippers of the Bible and other sacred books [q.v.].)"³⁵ Think for a minute of the liturgical procession with the Bible (or, even worse, the lectionary) held high as the procession moves up the aisle. We do not worship or revere the Bible as book, but as the cradle of the gospel. Or what does it communicate when we kiss the book at the conclusion of the reading of the gospel, but not at the conclusion of Romans 3:21-31 or Romans 4? "Actions speak louder than words," we say. But it is the words, together with the unanticipated grace to which they witness, that are the gospel, the word—not the book. "*Das Evangelium muß geschrieen werden,*" says Luther, not elevated as if it were the elements of the Lord's Supper. The confessions speak of the criterion of action as that which "necessitates Christ" or "magnifies Christ" or "gives glory to God." Do our physical actions about a book do that? *Ignosco—timeoque*.

Or take another symbolic action. In the Great Thanksgiving at the epiclesis many celebrants elevate their hands in blessing over the elements. That is, in my exegetical opinion, unbiblical, if not heretical. There simply is no biblical warrant for that gesture. If there is any tie between the *πνεῦμα ἅγιον* and the elements in the meal, it is that the loaf and the cup are bearers of the Spirit, not receivers of it. Our actions ought to indicate that it is the assembled people who need the Spirit to make their confession of Jesus as Lord in the meal a reality and to carry out the implications of the meal for unity in diversity into their lives and the life of the parish and denomi-

nations of which they are a part. In many parishes the most solemn moment in the celebration is the clearing of the altar as the congregation watches in silence while the housekeeping is done. And that in spite of the rubric that directs the table to be cleared during the post communion canticle! Why is that? I like the rubric in *WOV*, which directs the table to be prepared during the offering—though I have rarely seen it in practice.

Or take the matter of censuring the altar and the people. On the one hand I recall with my colleague Carl Graesser that after frequently worshipping in the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem, a church without the smell of incense seems to be missing something, ἀλλ' ὁμῶς. As a biblical scholar, I recall that incense may have been used in the Jewish temple to cover the probable stench arising from the sacrificial system. (Have you ever considered what worship there must have looked like?) But to cense the altar three times at the horns and the center appears to be a purification rite. It cannot be a consecration of the altar. Certainly it is not in continuity with the use of incense in the Jerusalem temple. Nor with the first century Jewish understanding of Philo, who felt that the equivalent of the temple incense in the diaspora synagogue was the prayers of the people. Indeed, we even sing that in Evening Prayer: "Let my prayer rise before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."

I become concerned with the censuring when I hear, as I do at *LSTC*, of colleagues and students who stay away from a service redolent of incense because of a physical reaction, or the person who did not attend the Easter Vigil at my home parish because of an apparent allergy to the incense. Then *Was Christum treibet* becomes important as an evangelical principle.

I was asked to be provocative in the three presentations in this series. I hope I was, but in terms of the gospel and what it implies. My function was to raise the evangelical banner high and ask how it should affect both proclamation and practice in worship. In other words, does an evangelical hermeneutic affect more than biblical interpretation?³⁶

Words matter! Matter much. In terms of Christian worship, possibly even ultimately for many who are present. Crafting a homily is as important as crafting a liturgy. Words do matter. In the year before she committed suicide, the poet Anne Sexton published a collection of poems entitled "The Aweful Rowing Toward God." One poem has the title "Words."³⁷ It is a poem to haunt one, especially if one wonders what words she heard as she tried to "row toward God."

Be careful of words,
even the miraculous ones.
For the miraculous we do our best,
sometimes they swarm like insects
and leave not a sting but a kiss.
They can be as good as fingers.
They can be as trustworthy as the rock
you stick your bottom on.
But they can be both daisies and bruises.

Yet I am in love with words.
They are doves falling out of the ceiling.
They are six holy oranges sitting in my lap.
They are the trees, the legs of summer,
and the sun, its passionate face.

Yet often they fail me.
I have so much I want to say,
so many stories, images, proverbs, etc.
But the words aren't good enough,
the wrong ones kiss me.
Sometimes I fly like an eagle
but with the wings of a wren.

But I try to take care
and be gentle to them.
Words and eggs must be handled with care.
Once broken they are impossible
things to repair.

Johann Albrecht Bengel authored an aphorism that stood at the beginning of the introduction to the first twenty-five editions of the Nestle Greek Testament, unfortunately dropped by Kurt Aland in the 26th and 27th. *Te totum applica ad rem; rem totam applica ad te*. "Apply yourself totally to the subject matter (i.e. of the New Testament); apply the subject matter totally to yourself." Do that, and your proclamation will be evangelical indeed, and your worship will follow the proclamation.

notes

¹ So that there is no doubt, I speak as a member of the ELCA, willingly and gladly bound by the doctrinal article of my church's constitution. It differs from similar articles in the constitution and mores of the LC-MS, the WELS, and other Lutheran bodies in the U.S.—though not from the large majority of Lutherans in the world. It recognizes three senses of the phrase "Word of God." First and foremost, in its primal sense, Jesus is the Word, as John 1:1 says. In the second sense, the Gospel is the "Word of God," proclaimed and believed. Only in a derived sense is the inscripturated Word the "Word of God" as it witnesses to that word in the first two senses. I affirm this interpretation of the term, since it accords with what the inscripturated word itself, Luther, and the Lutheran symbols say about the world.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996:35.

³ I cite the confessions from *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

⁴ Herman Diem, *Was heist Schriftgemäß?*, Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958.

⁵ See, inter alia, Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984; J.D.G. Dunn, "Levels of Canonical Authority," *The Living Word*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987:141-174; James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism*, GBS, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

⁶ FC, Rule and Norm 3, Tappert, 503.

⁷ Thus CA V says that the ministry exists to provide the Gospel and the sacraments. "Through these. . .the Holy Spirit works faith, when and where he pleases, in those

who hear the Gospel (*ubi et quando visum est deo*).” Cf. Apology XXVIII, “Ecclesiastical Power,” “They also quote the statement (Heb 13:17), ‘Obey you leaders,’ This statement requires obedience to the Gospel; it does not create an authority for bishops apart from the Gospel,” Tappert, 284.

⁸ Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

⁹ The phrase ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ is often misunderstood. λόγος denotes “connected rational discourse” in Greek rhetoric. In hellenistic philosophy it means the rational principle that gives coherence to the universe. Philo used the phrase to characterize the wisdom (σοφία) that is God’s creative agent, God’s way of “interfacing” with the world. A λόγος is a speech that truly accounts for and reflects the central truth from which everything flows.

¹⁰ See especially Hans Freiher von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972, and Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, revised and expanded edition, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

¹¹ Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and the three Johannine letters.

¹² The old brown cover version, for those of you with long memories—not blue cover, the larger edition which succeeded it.

¹³ See Johannes Leipoldt, “Die Frühgeschichte der Lehre von der göttlichen Eingebung,” ZNW 44, 1952/53:118-45; W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background*, Cambridge: University Press, 1955:17-45; R.M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit*, New York: Macmillan, 1957.

¹⁴ 2 Tim 3:16 All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

¹⁵ W. Goethe, *Faust*, Erster Teil, 863-83, from *Goethe Werke*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998:3.48. C.H. Dodd cites these words as the epigraph to his *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: University Press, 1953:xii.

¹⁶ There are many good sources for understanding Luther on the Bible. See Gerhard Gloege, *Mythologie und Luthertum: Recht und Grenze der Entmythologisierung*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963:135-57; Gerhard Ebeling, “Sola Scriptura and Tradition,” *The Word of God and Tradition*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968:102-47; A.E. Buchrucker, “Die regula atque norma in der Theologie Luthers,” NZSystTh 10, 1968:131-69; Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Principles of Luther’s Exegesis,” *Luther’s Works*, Companion Volume: *Luther the Expositor*, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969:5-134; Roland Bainton, “The Bible in the Reformation,” *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (vol.31): *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, Cambridge: University Press, 1963:1-37.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *A Brief Instruction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels*, 1521, pp.113–124 in *Luther’s Works*. American Edition. vol.35: *Word and Sacrament I* Ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960. (Page number in brackets in the citations)

¹⁸ WA 6, 560, 33-561, 2

¹⁹ Introduction to “Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum,” WA 7, 97, 23-24.

²⁰ WA 39, 1, 47, 19f.

²¹ *Kirchenpostil 1522. Evangelium am Tage der heiligen drei Könige*, Matt 2:1-12, WA 10, 1, 625,13-617, 10.

²² M. Luther, “Ad librum eximii Magistri Nostri Magistri Ambrosii Catharini” 1521 WA 7, 721, 9-20.

²³ *De servo Arbitrio*, WA 18,606, 22-29.

²⁴ “How Christians Should regard Moses,” *Luther’s Works*, vol.39, *Word and*

Sacrament I, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960:170,174.

²⁵ These prefaces are in *Luther's Works*, vol.39 *Word and Sacrament I*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960:357-411.

²⁶ See Klaus Dietrich Fricke, "The Apocrypha in the Luther Bible," *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective*, Siegfried Meurer, ed., UBS Monograph Series No.6; Reading, UK and New York: United Bible Societies, 1991:46-87. There are articles on the Apocrypha in different traditions; a truly useful book, relatively unknown.

²⁷ "An die Ratsherrn aller Städte deutschen lands, dass sie christliche schulen aufrichten und halten sollen," 1524, WA 15, 37,171-22.

²⁸ C.K. Barrett, *Biblical Problem and Biblical Preaching*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964:37-38.

²⁹ I took this phrase from *Scripture and Tradition: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995:41.

³⁰ Barrett, 37.

³¹ You will find these in vol.35 of the American Edition of *Luther's works*.

³² I make it a practice to listen to Bach's *Passion According to St. John* each Good Friday afternoon.

³³ I wage war against those who speak of "Gospel Lesson," as though gospel were not itself a noun.

³⁴ My former neighbor, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, described the Liturgy and Hymnal as the confessional book of the laity; any change therefore needed to be introduced carefully and empathetically.

³⁵ J.A. Cuddon, "Biblio-," *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd edition, London: Penguin Books, 1991:87.

³⁶ Cf. Ernst Kinder, *Evangelical: What Does It Really Mean?*, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, and Edward H. Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966:81-87, and John H. Elliot, "The Preacher and the Proclamation in *ibid.*," 99-130.

³⁷ "Words," in Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems*, with a foreword by Maxine Kumin, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981:463-64.