

FORUM LETTER

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Regretful of his sinful nature

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“We went to a Methodist church, though not yet members; we’d switched from Roofing Lutheran the previous year, a move I didn’t wholly understand. The new minister wasn’t half the exciting preacher our old one was. Pastor Reach was slight, with a limp and a speech problem that altered some of his consonants. [We] had been used to oratory; our former pastor could exhort like everything and owned what Dad said must be a special edition of the Holy Bible, for it contained things omitted from our own — references to card-playing, for example, and rock and roll, and the Russian people. Our former minister had so much energy that simply pastoring wasn’t enough; he also wrote regular editorials for the paper in the county seat of Montrose, which riled up readers and made him a star. Pastor Reach had no such ambitions. . . He had a plain Bible, like ours, and preached right out of it. Always regretful of his sinful nature, Pastor Reach was a great advocate of forgiveness, in which he put a lot of stock. Thrilling he was not.” — *from Peace Like a River by Leif Enger (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001)*

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Tranquillitas ordinis and our continuing obligation to Iraq



It hasn’t been a good few months for the Bush Administration, not within the pages of *First Things*, at any rate (www.firstthings.com). Anyone reading it since the first of the year has encountered some very intense criticism of President Bush, and some defenses, to be sure. *First Things* is always good at making certain there is a conversation that involves two sides, even if, in this case, the conversation was limited to the two sides of the conservative side. It is the criticism that has my attention, mostly because I agree with a good deal of it. I’m not the only one, either. Reports are, to note this only in passing, that at the early March Conservative Political Action Conference, 79 percent polled said they wanted a Republican nominee like Ronald Reagan. Preferences for a George Bush-like nominee came to 3 percent. Most believed, too, that Democratic gains in Congress were due to the war in Iraq and George Bush’s performance as president. Social conservatives — put me in that number — are unhappy with President Bush, but we are each unhappy in a different way.

Another fine mess

But, back to *First Things*. There was a point/counterpoint exchange in

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March between Joseph Bottum, the editor, and Michael Novak, listed on his www.michaelnovak.net web page as an “author, philosopher, theologian.” Bottum, who lacks only a personal web page saying so, equally qualifies as all three. He wonders out loud whether Bush has been a disaster for conservatism. Actually, he did more than wonder. He said so. Bottum’s chief criticism is that while Bush may be conservative, he at best has been an incompetent conservative. On one issue after another, as Hardy would say to Laurel, so Bottum repeats to Bush, “This is another fine mess you’ve gotten us into.”

Not as bad as it sounds

Novak’s *First Things* response cites a considerable number of Bush achievements in and for social conservatism. Under Bottum’s withering essay, though, Novak’s reply would fall best under the category of Mark Twain’s line about Wagner’s music: “It’s not as bad as it sounds.” Novak apparently is so stung by Bottum’s Bush critique he goes into an extensive defense of the Administration, and at greater length, at his web site, concluding:

President Bush has defined a new kind of conservatism. It is legitimate to criticize it, even to oppose it vigorously. But to do so honestly and accurately, one must note the change in method that President Bush has quietly and successfully been enacting. As often as possible, in as many ways as possible, he is using the dynamo of personal choice and the methods of the market, not direct state-management, in order to make government programs more effective and more efficient. That is why Democrats, both of the old New Deal-type and of the new Clinton-type, oppose him so fiercely. They seem to see what he is up to better than many uneasy conservatives do.

Try to imagine the conservative future as Bush is trying to: Old-age assistance is mostly achieved by

personal tax-exempt pension accounts. Medicare and other health expenses are paid for by means of personal, tax-exempt medical accounts (partly used for catastrophic insurance, mostly for ordinary health spending, and with a new incentive to watch over normal expenses carefully). Parental choice and market mechanisms help to weed out failing schools, replacing them with better ones. (*Conservative Bush: An Effective and Pioneering President*, www.michaelnovak.net/Module/Article/ArticleView.aspx?id=226)

The Bottum/Novak exchange is interesting, of course. As Novak argues, the Bush domestic accomplishments are impressive. Were those the only things by which to judge the Bush presidency, his successes might have some glitter. But they matter little because they are being squeezed by the 900-lb. gorilla, Iraq.

Novak’s defense of the Bush Administration is notable, then, for what it does not mention and it mentions Iraq not at all. Likely that is calculated. Everywhere one looks, Iraq has squished the Bush presidency. It makes the President’s other successes, if any, look small. The Bush presidency will not be judged on domestic matters. It will be judged almost exclusively on his conduct of the Iraq war.

I frankly believe the President’s conduct of the war has been a failure, strategically, tactically, morally.

A just post-war ethic

Which brings me to the next *First Things* issue to examine the Bush Administration, and this solely on the conduct of the Iraq war.

George Weigel’s “Just War and Iraq Wars” from April is the best analysis of Iraq and Bush I have read. He is plenty hard on the Bush Administration but — thanks to the “surge” — his essay can be characterized as cautiously optimistic on the ultimate outcome.

Weigel begins his critique with the just war ethic, and ties it crucially to a “just post-war” ethic.

Acting on the intelligence we had at the time, the goal of removing Saddam and planting a more democratic government in his place met, I believe, the conditions of a just war. Had we known then what we know now about the absence of weapons of mass destruction, the case for war might have been harder to make, and may never have been made at all. That is a “what if” of history. At all events, at the time, the justification for war existed.

But the next obligation after having gone to war — second only to insuring the just conduct of it — is creating the proper conditions for a following peace. The envisioned good outcome of war must outweigh the brutality of the war itself. That, Weigel says, “includes the duty to build the peace of *tranquillitas ordinis*, the peace of a just public order.” In short, the “proportionate and discriminate use of force must aim at the construction of the peace of order, which is composed of security, justice, and freedom.”

Security is the Bush Administration’s singular failure in Iraq. The failure in securing Iraq’s public safety is also the failure of providing a necessary peaceful space for the development of justice and freedom. Weigel catalogues Iraq failures well, all the poor estimations of the war’s cost, conduct, and outcome. Weigel is unsparing of the Bush Administration. If anything, he is not unsparing enough, not to suit me. I have never seen efforts in a good cause applied so badly and, when things in Iraq started going south, so stubbornly squandered.

Briefly authentic liberators

There were never enough occupation troops to impose adequate security, once Saddam’s army disintegrated. We should remember, there was a brief period, just prior to the conclusion of “major combat operations,” when coalition military forces were greeted as genuine and authentic liberators by both Sunni and Shia.

But, here’s a signal, when we were unwilling to stop the early looting of government ministries and national museum treasures, we revealed a half-heartedness about our effort. Our unwillingness was due to an inability to properly impose security and order. That and other security lapses helped turn Iraqi opinion against our presence and an emboldened enemy has taken advantage of it.

Additionally, our inability to lock-down Iraqi borders is a further contribution to the continuing mayhem, and it is again evidence there were never enough soldiers on the ground to do a proper job.

There are now three coincidental wars in Iraq, as Weigel defines them. The war to depose Saddam is over, but three continue: the Baathist and other Saddamist hold-outs who immediately targeted occupation forces and who still find some opportunity; Al-Qaeda, which views “Islamic democracy” as an oxymoronic offense against Islam and doesn’t want it in Iraq, has been able to import foreign fighters through porous borders; and the Sunni/Shia sectarian war involving militias and death squads and ethnically cleansed neighborhoods.

All of this arose because the Administration wanted and mistakenly expected a cheap post-war occupation.

The fix we’re in

Weigel appears to hold the opinion that the new counterinsurgency strategy and “surge” conceived and led by General David Petraeus may produce results. And perhaps they will. That will happen, though, only as troop strength is added and bolstered to the point where killers are no longer willing or able to pick up a gun.

To this point, I am not in the least optimistic. I fear it may be too late, militarily and politically, here and in Iraq to properly exploit the new strategy. Repeatedly asked if more soldiers were needed, Bush officials repeatedly said the field commanders had not made any requests for additional troops, that present force levels were adequate. Of course the generals didn’t ask. Everyone knew it wasn’t a request the Administration would favor, and no commander asking would be favored.

Following his reelection I expected the President to reevaluate the Rumsfeld approach — his occupation lite. Nothing of the sort happened. Two years of ever increasing violence, bloodshed and social chaos continued unabated in Iraq without any appreciable public recognition or response by the Administration. The congressional shake-up, almost exclusively due to mishandling of the war, finally compelled an overdue reassessment. Now that there is in place what many hope

is a better strategy — and on the surface, I think it is — the Administration may not have enough time to see it fully implemented.

We are in a fix.

The only worse thing than being in Iraq now is leaving Iraq now. No voice claiming serious moral authority possibly could wish for the inevitable bloodbath that surely would follow a premature withdrawal of American forces in the immediate future. Yet there is good reason to fear, it may come to exactly that.

If you break it

Shortly before Christmas I listened to an interview with a nine-year-old Iraqi girl. Her father had just been killed in the sectarian violence; Sunni or Shia, I don't remember. It doesn't matter, does it? She was bewildered, heart-broken. Even through a translator, I could hear in her voice all the anguished sorrow that has become Iraq. When

Jesus wept before the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, was he not also weeping for her.

The reputed warning by former Secretary of State Colin Powell to Bush, "if you break it, you will own it," is an apt summary of America's continuing obligations to the Iraqi people. We are not quite, but nearly the only mediating presence the Iraqis now have in their nation. I know. Americans signed on to a war to remove the threat Saddam represented to us and to the region. We did not sign on to stand between sectarian factions settling old, old scores. But an Iraq caked in blood is in no one's interest. An Iraq at peace is in all our interests.

The military role — possible only with sufficient boots on the ground — is to now create a zone *tranquillitas* where the Iraqi factions have diplomatic opportunity to define the *ordinis* our intervention originally promised. — *by the editor*

Energy-efficient compact fluorescent light sources



When I snatched Wife from the warm and cozy environs of Charleston, SC some many years back and moved her to Missouri, I had to make a promise. If it ever snowed on Easter, we'd move back to South Carolina. It is not quite a codicil to my Letter of Call, but everyone around here knows about it. Wife makes sure of that.

A safe promise, I figured. That happened, after all, in the same year the ELCA issued an environmental statement warning about greenhouse gasses getting the earth all hotted up. Global warming soon would make South Carolina a hothouse hell and Missouri a temperate paradise Wife would never want to leave.

Well, that hasn't worked. Mind you, it has never snowed on Easter, so my Missouri address is still safe. But it has snowed on Palm Sunday and on the Sunday after Easter, and it was cold enough this Easter that it should have.

We had a false Spring this year. Blossoms were a-bloomin' and buds a-buddin' and pow! we were suddenly faced with highs of 36, night time lows of 22, and killer wind-chills. I overheard a

guy muttering at the gas pump, "Where's that global warming we keep hearing about?" An ironic location from which to ask the question, but given the ambient air temperature, understandable. My four redbud trees — some of the Spring brilliance I always look forward to — never had a chance. They went all brown and achy overnight. This year the best part about April in Kansas City was that it wasn't April in Cleveland.

The big chill

I'll be honest. I can't think what to make of global warming. A recent science report flatly says it is real and it is human made. Like it or lump it. So what happened between the 1970's and the 2000's? In the 1970's another Big Chill ice age was being speculated about. Now, everyone has warmed up to warming. There are holdouts. A significant number of informed folks contend the present warming isn't so different from other periodic warmings from the end of the last ice age, 11,500 years ago. Some of the warmings have been warmer than now. Vikings were farming Greenland and vineyards were lush in England

during what is called the Medieval Warm Period, roughly dated 900 AD to 1300 AD. Nowadays, try that, and it'll all look like my sad redbuds.

Nor, so far as I know, has anybody answered the CO₂ problem. There are holes, big ones, in the theory that CO₂ is the driving force in global warming. Explain why temperatures began warming at the end of the Little Ice Age (1500-1850), long before human-made CO₂ emissions could have impacted the climate. Then about 1940, just as manufactured CO₂ emissions began a sharp rise, the temperatures began an average decline that lasted until the 1970's, prompting all that fear of a coming ice age. CO₂ may not be the culprit.

There is some new science, suggestive that sun spot activity may play a significant role in earth temperatures, explaining, too, why Mars seems to be warming up as well.

Carbon reductions

Of course, I don't think it is a good idea, in any general sense, to spew carbon emissions endlessly into the atmosphere. In fact, if all radical environmentalists would cease exhaling carbon dioxide five minutes out of every hour, I bet we'd see an appreciable reduction in atmospheric carbons. I don't think it would hurt the trees.

Okay, I wasn't being entirely serious. But I am all for less reliance on oil, combustion engines, and the like — if their elimination does not lead to greater poverty, more hunger, and economic dislocation.

Still, to hear some tell it, science has settled the matter, even if it hasn't answered all the questions.

Amazing omissions

That, at any rate, is the position ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson takes in his 2007 Earth Day message, issued the week after Easter when global warming prevented snow in Kansas City.

(I'll note this just as an aside, but Earth Day inexplicably has been left off of the list of Principal Festivals in the latest service book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Worse, it doesn't even merit a footnote in the Lesser Festivals and Commemorations section. If you detect here a slightly mocking tone of false amazement, that's deliberate.)

Bp. Hanson's message this year (you can find it at www.elca.org/bishop/messages/m_070411.html) calls our attention to the ELCA's 1993 statement *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*. The title by now probably sounds a little "last century" but the bishop updates it with some hot words about global warming.

As I fish through the message I come away with the idea that carbon emissions are evil, consistent with "our sinful treatment of God's gift of the earth." It is a problem, I'll admit, and a substantial part of the problem turns out to be, well, us. "Those of us who live in the United States," the bishop says, "produce one-quarter of the world's carbon emissions, even though we are only five percent of the planet's human population."

Sounds really bad, but I think I've found a way out. If the bishop were to limit his equation to just the European Union, well, then, there'd be more evil carbon producers over there than over here. That should make him feel better. It of course won't do much for making Europeans feel better, but then Europeans have never felt guilty about being Europeans, not in the way that Americans and their bishops frequently feel guilty about being Americans. But if that doesn't work, wait thirty years. By then the Chinese economic expansion will have outpaced U.S. carbon production capacities and our contributions will look paltry in comparison, plus there will be more people to blame.

Happily, the bishop isn't all doom and gloom. He does hold out some measure of hope for us.

"Although," he writes, "we are complicit in the evil that we see, we can repent of our own sinful misuse and abuse of the Earth, direct and indirect, when we confess our sins." Part of that repentance following confession is "to take up the challenge presented to us as a people of hope and conviction by the threat of global warming."

A heart not properly disposed

There are a couple things you can do right now to show remorse (at least I think he is alluding to remorse for our complicity in evil, remorse being typically regarded as an element of repentance).

One, “consider contacting your elected officials to urge them to address this problem.” Now, it isn’t exactly clear whether I am to urge them to address global warming itself or ask them to tackle the problem of my own “complicit evil,” but if I had to guess it would be global warming.

Two, this is the easy one, look for ways “to reduce your use of fossil fuels.” To do that, walk more, use public transportation, and — oh! oh! — “change your light bulbs to energy-efficient compact fluorescent light sources.”

Two things about this last. First, “energy-efficient compact fluorescent light sources”? Who exactly talks like that? Second, I’m way ahead of him. I switched out all my light bulbs seven years ago, and a couple of those compact energy-efficient little sucker replacements are still shining away brightly. I’ll confess, though. My heart was not properly disposed, not in the least. I wasn’t repenting of anything I can recall. I was in it strictly for the money. I just wanted to save on my electric bill. *Mea culpa.*

Goofy sin

Listen, I understand the point. I even

sympathize with it. Like I said, I’m all for reductions in energy consumption, and that’s without even being sure global warming is human-made or naturally recurring, so I don’t mind if environmentalists go on exhaling time to time as necessary.

But to suggest, even indirectly, that confession and repentance for the “sin” of poor environmental choices can be eased in part by using “energy-efficient compact fluorescent light sources” is kind of goofy.

I do sincerely hope no one does for the bishop what those mean journalists did for Al Gore, publishing those remarkable statistics on his own personal energy consumption and noting how he has heavily positioned himself with companies selling “carbon credits.”

Perhaps, to fend off such troublesome inquiry, the bishop should consider cutting back on his travel schedule, walking more, and working from home where he will produce less of a carbon footprint than that generated by working in an office building. But only so long as he’s under a compact energy-efficient fluorescent light source, especially during those times when he’s composing important messages. — *by the editor*

A parish pastor takes on *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

by Wollom A. Jensen



Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) is now a *fait accompli* in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The flurry of orders by congregations for the hard copy book caught Augsburg-Fortress by surprise and many orders for the new “cranberry book” were back ordered while the additional run of printing took place. The congregation that I serve as pastor was one of many across the ELCA that had to wait while the backorders were filled. Much to my surprise, when my congregation voted to purchase *ELW*, subscriptions for the books we needed were filled in merely three weeks.

I am not a liturgical scholar but simply a parish pastor who is neither as humble as I would

like to be nor as rural as my North Dakota upbringing would suggest that I might be. However, after more than thirty years as an ordained pastor serving in congregational, chaplaincy, seminary, and once again congregational ministry, I have learned a thing or two regarding worship in the Lutheran context. Introducing *ELW* to a congregation is the second time I’ve had the responsibility of introducing a new book of worship to a congregation. Previously, I was responsible for introducing the *Lutheran Book of Worship* in two successive congregations to which I had been called as pastor.

I am not a revisionist and hold very little affinity for the “political correctness” of that particular movement. While I am not opposed to the civil recognition of same gender relationships

for purposes of tax, inheritance, hospital visitations, etc., I hear no compelling arguments for such an arrangement in Scripture and find no persuasive arguments for changing the constitutional documents of the Church to accommodate either same gender blessings or ordination of professing and practicing homosexuals. Yet, here I am introducing *ELW* with enthusiasm (albeit bridled) to my congregation.

Again, my enthusiasm for *ELW* is not unbridled. I do not like the emasculation of the liturgy, the Psalms, or the Scripture with the resultant alteration of the clear intent of the original texts; nor do I approve of the weakening of the Trinitarian identification even though I fully understand that most of us are identified by our “nick-names” and rarely identify ourselves through the use of our formal given names. I am bothered by the weakness of the *epiclesis* in the Eucharistic prayers and bored by the triteness of the music that seems to be little more than condescension to the “modern ear” *a la* the mega-church movement.

It is what it is

That being said, there are many things to like about *ELW*. I like the structure of the liturgical settings that provides for great flexibility in usage. The renewed and clear emphasis upon Baptism and catechesis is sorely needed in a church showing the effects of the erosion of denominational loyalties. I like the re-introduction of harmony in the hymnody of the church and I greatly appreciate the options for different musical settings for the various parts of the liturgy including the *Kyrie*, Hymn of Praise, Gospel Acclamation, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, and the *Nunc Dimitis*.

My support of *ELW*, however, is not based upon any of the foregoing. My embrace of *ELW* as a pastor serving a congregation of the ELCA is simply based upon the reality the *ELW* is a *fait accompli*. It is irrelevant how and by what machinations and maneuverings it came about that *ELW* is now *the* worship book of the ELCA. That’s a battle that has been, depending upon one’s perspective, either won or lost already and is not worth the energy it takes to rehash it. As my children often remind me when they see me gathering a head of steam over one issue or another, “Dad, forget it. It

is what it is.”

Schism as divorce

There are two main reasons why I have opted to introduce *ELW* into the worship life of the congregation I am currently serving.

First, over thirty-plus years of ministry, I have learned enough about liturgy to know how to use its flexibility while remaining faithful to my calling as an ordained pastor of the church. I have solemnly promised to exercise my ministry in fidelity to the Scriptures and the Confessions of the Church. Where there is ambiguity as to the identity of the God in whose name we have been baptized, I revert to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rather than whatever gender neutral aspects might be “suggested” in the liturgical text. Where the elimination of masculine pronouns has led to the altering of clear intent of the original text, I have chosen other translations that are exegetical rather than eisegetical. Where Eucharistic prayers have strayed from or weakened the *epiclesis*, I have simply inserted the appropriate calling of the Holy Spirit and found ways within the framework to hold steady to the four part action of the Eucharistic meal.

Secondly, and I think more importantly, I have embraced *ELW* because I am opposed to a culture that is too quick and too casual in its embrace of divorce. Again, *ELW* is a *fait accompli* (i. e., “an accomplished fact”) for the ELCA. There is much too much talk, conversation, and movement within the ELCA and among the various constituencies toward schism — and you may read that “divorce.” Jesus’ high priestly prayer in the Gospel of John is clear with respect to the unity of the church. I believe that schism, like divorce, is never something to be pursued but must occasionally be endured and acknowledged as the result of sin that it in fact is.

Faithful use

Although *ELW* is not what I would wish, nor what I would construct, it is nevertheless the worship book of my church. Seeking to remain faithful to the promises I made at my ordination and trusting in the Gospel which sets us free, I have opted to use the *ELW* as faithfully as my understanding allows me to in leading the congre-

gation I serve in its work of praising and adoring God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Rev. Dr. Wollom A. Jensen, STS., has recently

returned to the parish to lead Messiah Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA after service as executive vice president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg. This is his first contribution to Forum Letter.

Omnium gatherum



Hanson challenger ● Our considered opinion that Mark Hanson is a shoo-in for another term as ELCA presiding bishop hasn't changed, but there is a challenger. Word Alone (WA) President Jaynan Clark Eglund — at the urging of the WA board — has agreed to be available as an alternative candidate to Bp. Hanson. As presiding bishop she would “call for repentance for this slipping, sliding denomination and its wayward public witness.” She would also “downsize the ELCA institution” and “upsized the ministry.” You can read the full statement at www.wordalone.net/nr/hats-fly.shtml.

Eglund is hardly a stereotypical pietistic Midwestern Lutheran pastor, and she has been an effective leader for WA. Likely she would be an interesting presiding bishop — if lightning strikes, creeks rise and the Hand of God directly intervenes as ballots are marked. Still, any serious nominee would need to be someone who can appeal both to the “protestant pietist” and the “evangelical catholic” varieties of Lutheran confessionalism. Eglund's swipe at “the yoke of slavery thrust upon the ELCA as a result of the full communion agreement with the Episcopalians” is

hardly designed to bridge that divide.

Amazon.com ● A subscriber reports she found Robert Jenson's *A Large Catechism*, an ALPB Books publication, listed for \$47.86 at Amazon.com. Do not buy it. Buy it instead directly from the ALPB. We charge \$4.00. Of course, were you to send along the additional \$43.86 that Amazon.com thinks it is worth, the ALPB executive director would enclose a very nicely worded thank you note, personally signed.

Reginald Fuller, R.I.P ● Some months back we made a mistake and then made a correction regarding the Rev. Dr. Reginald Fuller, Anglican New Testament scholar. Our initial item had referred to him as “the late,” as in dead. Turned out he was still very much alive. But now he has entered the Church Triumphant, having died Wednesday of Holy Week in Richmond, VA at the age of 92. Fuller was a fine scholar whose *Preaching the New Lectionary* (first published in 1974 and now in its third edition) helped many pastors of diverse denominations learn how to homiletically navigate the three-year lectionary. *Rest eternal grant him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.*

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