

# FORUM LETTER

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## The word less spoken

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“This may be the time to respond to an oft asked question about what the “forum” in our title means. Does it mean that *Forum* is a forum for every viewpoint in American Lutheranism? The answer is no. The word forum refers to our goal — that American Lutheranism might be, among other things, a forum marked by the free flow of information and the sustained engagement of responsible argument. To advance that goal, *Forum* gives particular attention to news and viewpoints that the officialdom might neglect or prefer to quash. *Forum* is not simply a gadfly, exulting in raising the disagreeable. What we write about may at times be disagreeable to some parties, but our purpose is to be an alternative and determinedly independent source of news and opinion. We are not opposed to the “official church.” We seek to serve it better than it frequently serves itself. From the official offices there flows an abundance of “information.” Much of it is — as is the way with all human institutions — puffery and plain propaganda. *Forum* intends to speak the word less spoken, while also cheering the good words spoken by the officialdom, when that is appropriate. . . . Nor should it be thought that *Forum* is disinterested and, as they say, value-neutral. From its founding almost 70 years ago, the [American Lutheran Publicity Bureau] has had a mission. Central to that mission is the advancement of the unity of the Church through the renewal of confessional Lutheranism as an evangelical catholic movement of reform. In addition, the founders committed us to a particular concern for strengthening the role of Lutheranism in American society. The language of that mission may change to meet new occasions, but the mission continues. We ask to be judged by the measure of that mission as we move into an American Lutheran future in which independent voices will be more rare, and therefore more needed.” — by Richard John Neuhaus, *Forum Letter* (16:9 December 31, 1987)

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## Orwellian church council monitors



Imagine this, a pastoral colleague finds it “Orwellian.” He is describing the proposal before the church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to appoint “racial justice monitors” for its meetings, according to an ELCA press release (“ELCA Council Assumes Responsibility to Address Racism, Sexism,” April 19). “Racial justice monitors” for the church council was presented “as a mechanism for accountability” in the council’s on-going commitment to address racism, sexism, and other bad things.

The ELCA's council has been working very hard indeed on the entire subject of how to suppress racism and sexism within its own membership. In point of fact, the proposal for "racial justice monitors" is the result of a specific assignment the council gave to its Board Development Committee way back in November. Now, finally, at the April meeting, the council has at last voted to begin planning for its own "continuous education, reflection and training on the issue of sexism, just as the church council has committed itself to continuous education, reflection and training on the issue of racism." "Racial justice monitors" at future meetings is part of that endeavor.

The specific proposal at the moment, though, is limited to "racial justice monitors." There is no word from the press release on the appointment of "sexism monitors," nor monitors of any other kind for the array of issues cited in the release for which the council assumes responsibility — barriers to inclusion that are "ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual, physical, personal and class" in nature. The absence of monitors in these areas is an oversight that one may hope will be addressed shortly.

### Joyful enhancements

Meanwhile, as described in the press release, a "racial justice monitor" will "provide observations on the process of deliberations of the council." That, as the ELCA presiding bishop, Mark Hanson, elaborated, means a "racial justice monitor" is "not a judge that sits and issues a verdict" but acts as a "mirror," raising "provocative questions" at the end of each meeting about how "the role of white privilege," clearly enjoyed by the white members of the council, may have affected "the context of the meeting." I'm only speculating here — the press release did not offer many specific details — but "observations on the process" may include counting the number of times white people speak, as compared to the frequency of minority speakers.

The probable appointment of "racial justice monitors" was greeted joyfully by council members. More than one was eager to offer enhancements to the plan.

Council member Allan Thomas, Yeadon, PA suggested that "one or two council members"

themselves could be "trained to serve as monitors for the council."

### Separate monitors for separate ism's

I would think two monitors, minimum; one to monitor the other. This is a not unreasonable precaution, and perhaps even a necessary one. While two may go through training, there is no guarantee that both will return equally skilled in ferreting out the role that white privilege plays in the council's deliberative processes. The council, after all, simply cannot be too careful in these things.

Council member Gary Wipperman from Waverly, IA noted, as did I, the neglect that sexism will suffer if monitors are limited only to racial justice. He suggested that "racial justice monitors" also serve as "mirrors" for the council "on matters of sexism."

Personally, I'm not sure this would be wise. I would argue instead, separate monitors for separate ism's. The "mirroring" might otherwise become too blurry if only one set of monitors had to monitor all the many areas of concern that require monitoring. Ignore one area and the council might miss the point of being monitored in the first place — for white privilege, male dominance and so forth. If there was only one set of monitors to cover all of it something surely would go unmonitored, so the more monitors the better, I think. That way, everybody is certain of being monitored by everyone for something, lessening the possibility of any unmonitored slip-ups.

### Careful monitoring

Unfortunately, according to the press release, one council member — a certain Grieg Anderson from Portland, OR — did raise a worry, wondering if the presence of "racial justice monitors" might "have a stifling effect on a full and healthy debate on a number of issues, simply out of fear of having it misconstrued in some way." Anderson cautioned that he did not want something that might be "viewed as stifling different views and different reflections."

Umm. Obviously, this is a council member who has failed to grasp the many benefits of groupthink. Doubtless, this is an example of the very thing the council must carefully monitor in

the future, very carefully indeed.

### Checking the restrooms

I venture my own suggestion. There is a class of monitors (besides sex) missing from the church council's proposal. It is all very well and good for the council to appoint monitors for its formal meetings, held in a conference room at the ELCA headquarters building in Chicago. But what about those inevitable periods in the building when the council is in recess and some of these folks decide go off on their own, say, to the restrooms. I don't think it is a very good idea to let ELCA council members roam the building un-

monitored. So, yes — and I see some of you are way ahead of me here — I think the proposal should be expanded to include hallway monitors.

Immediately.

As for my colleague's use of the word "Orwellian" as a pejorative description of the proposal, well, what can I say? He has clearly misconstrued things. Besides, can't "Orwellian" ever be used positively? Oh, sure, I know most commentators regard George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* as a dystopian novel. But let us do remember, the story really is about how protagonist Winston Smith came to truly love Big Brother. A happy ending, if ever there was. — *by the editor*

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## Sacramentum Caritatis

by David Poedel, STS



*Sacramentum Caritatis (The Sacrament of Charity)* from Pope Benedict XVI was released early March. Largely on the Eucharist, the ability of the pope to express the beauty of the catholic Christian faith is stunning. There is much in this document that parallels *Dominus Iesus*, issued a few years back by the sainted Pope John Paul the Great. It would be interesting to know, from the inside of the Vatican, why the current pope felt it necessary to issue such a comprehensive document so close on the heels of the previous one. I can speculate that the issues addressed are still present and this pontiff wants to make sure that everyone knows there will be no change under him.

There is much to commend in this document, especially in the sections that describe the purpose of the Holy Eucharist as mystery, as a Trinitarian gift to us and as a constitutive part of the church.

That reported, I find it sad that, while there is much beautiful language here about the Eucharistic mysteries, there is also a reiteration of the neuralgic issues like: no sacraments for divorced persons; a recommendation that for a funeral, wedding or other liturgy when a significant number of non-Roman Catholics are likely to be present, a Liturgy of the Word be utilized rather than the Mass; an increased emphasis on Eucharis-

tic adoration outside the Mass including *Corpus Christi* processions; Mary's role in the Eucharist and the importance of prayer to her; the importance of and use of indulgences for oneself and for the dead (but an encouragement of a "balanced use," I guess that means...oh, never mind).

### Christ's own way of life

Focusing on some of the issues, let me quote the document in places that I think put the best construction on things.

On the importance of priestly celibacy in relationship to the Eucharist:

The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life. This choice has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives

his life for his Bride.

While there is recognition of the Eastern Church having married priests, the document commends their tradition that requires bishops to be celibate, coupled with an implication that the bishop is the true celebrant in the eucharistic celebrations of his diocese. How, then, do the Pastoral Provision priests (including some former Lutheran pastors) fit into this conforming of one's life in imitation of Christ? Does a "state of virginity" have a statute of limitations for the widower who comes to the priesthood after the death of his spouse? If priestly celibacy is beyond "purely functional terms," in what way are Rome's few married priests affected?

### Receiving Christ's sacrifice

On Mary's role in the Eucharist, the document has some strange language:

Consequently, every time we approach the Body and Blood of Christ in the eucharistic liturgy, we also turn to [Mary] who, by her complete fidelity, received Christ's sacrifice for the whole Church.

What does this mean? Is Christ the center of the Eucharist or not? For what shall we look to His Blessed Mother if the all-availing sacrifice of our savior on the cross is sufficient? How does Mary "receive Christ's sacrifice for the whole Church"? Strange.

Most of the encouraged practice and piety called for in this document are listed in our Confessions as "abuses." Despite the obvious reality that if one were taken blindfolded to Sunday worship, one would have a difficult time telling whether it was a Roman Catholic or evangelical catholic congregation at worship (okay, the Lutherans would sing better). But there is no other

movement by Rome to make any kind of reconciliation possible within the lifetime of my grandchildren, unless we were to give away the whole store. While individual Lutheran pastors are "swimming the Tiber" — and I hear that a micro-synod made up of a couple of folks is planning an organic merger (holding my breath, I am not) — there is no mechanism otherwise except "come home," and even that is said to be in doubt. In 2003 my wife and I took a course called "Ecumenical Theology from a Roman Catholic Perspective" at the Centro Pro Unione in Rome. There we were explicitly told that "come home" was no longer Rome's model for organic reunion. Well, show me another way.

### The chill of winter

This document adds to my sadness, the realization that this current pope, in spite of his familiarity with and appreciation for Lutheranism, is doing nothing that would encourage any movement toward reconciliation or even deeper dialogue except "let's not say bad things about each other, but let's not get too close either."

I am one of the few LCMS members of the Society of the Holy Trinity (I hereby invite my brothers reading this to consider joining). One of the goals of the Society is to work toward reconciliation with the bishop of Rome, a goal I long for and pray for daily. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, in the chill of the ecumenical winter presently in place, makes me grieve that I am unlikely to see any tangible signs of this in my lifetime on this earth. Oh Lord, may I be wrong!

*A pastor in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, David Poedel, STS, serves Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Phoenix, AZ <padredave@azlutheran.org>. This is his first contribution to Forum Letter. The full text of Sacramentum Caritatis may be found at <http://www.adoremus.org/SacramentumCaritatis.html>.*

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## Christian Century books



I always look forward to the occasional book issues of *The Christian Century*. The reviews are

helpful, and often lead me to purchase books. Sometimes they are titles I've been meaning to buy, sometimes titles of which I've never heard,

sometimes even titles that had not interested me at all until I read the review.

### Best selling lite

But what I really find fascinating are the lists of the five “best sellers” from various publishers of religious books. The spring issue, for instance, informs us that the ubiquitous Bart Ehrman appears four times on best seller lists from two different publishers. All of his stuff, of course, is in the nature of “how the early church screwed up genuine Christianity, from the point of view of a non-Christian” (I think he’s even got one coming out soon with that title). But obviously the man knows how to write since people are buying his books. Or maybe they’re just buying his titles. I own a couple of them myself — just to see what they’re like, understand. What they’re like is “Bible and Church History Lite. Very Lite.”

So here we have Oxford University Press with three Ehrman titles on its list of five (boy, that bothers me), and then a book about Muhammed (that’s how this book spells it). Oh, and a new edition of Augustine’s *Confessions*. Well, not new, exactly. It’s a reprint of an older translation. But it’s nice to know there is still a place for the classics at Oxford.

Yale University has some good stuff — more scholarly than Oxford, I would say. Some of it too scholarly for me, but I might buy a title or two. There are some top rate authors there: Catherine Albanese and Eamon Duffy are both first-rate historians, and their books would be worth reading.

Several of the publishers represented here offer more popular items. Abingdon has a new title by William Willimon, and he’s always a good read for a preacher. HarperSanFrancisco has the fourth Ehrman title, but also some other titles he might have used, like *Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and Evidence That Could Change History* by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino. I’ve never heard of them, but I’m told that the former is “an award winning and controversial documentary director.” I think I’ll give that one a pass.

### Evangelically best

Once again it is the evangelical presses that

seem, on balance, to have the best offerings. InterVarsity Press has some great choices, such as N. T. Wright’s *Evil and the Justice of God*. I’ve got that one already, and have been thinking about using it for an adult class. Craig Evans’ *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* sounds interesting. Would Bart Ehrman use that title?

Eerdmans offers titles by Eugene Peterson and Marva Dawn, popular writers (in both senses of the word), and with good reason. They also published Mark Allan Powell’s *Giving to God: The Bible’s Good News About Living a Generous Life*. I’ve got that one on order, having recently heard Powell (a New Testament scholar at Trinity Lutheran Seminary) speak about stewardship at my synod assembly. I was impressed. I ended up quadrupling the check I wrote for the offering at the closing Eucharist. I even ordered the DVD of his presentations. Now that’s “impressed”!

I scrolled through the list of his other books at Amazon.com. Seems he’s been published by Abingdon, Paulist, Westminster/John Knox, occasionally even by Fortress. Makes one wonder yet again why so many Lutheran scholars are published elsewhere (and especially, it seems, by Eerdmans).

### Fortress priorities

Well, Fortress maybe has other priorities. Their best sellers are listed, too. A book about Habitat for Humanity, another about “restoring hope in African American communities,” another about social justice — do I detect a trend here? Oh, and then one on church administration, and one on world religions. The “hard disciplines” of theology, Biblical studies, church history, seem, uh, unrepresented among the Fortress best-sellers.

Probably this is just good marketing; they publish all these other things that sell a lot of copies so they can use the profits to publish the less *avant garde* things. And one can’t really blame Fortress if the more traditional stuff doesn’t sell. (Though it does seem to sell at Eerdmans and InterVarsity Press.) At least they don’t publish any titles by Bart Ehrman.

### Missing Concordia

I don’t understand why *The Christian*

*Century* doesn't include Concordia in its list of religious publishers. They publish plenty of serious stuff, and it deserves a wider audience than the Missouri Synod. Of course it does tend to be "Lutheran-oriented," so perhaps the editors of *The Christian Century* think nobody outside of LCMS would be much interested. And maybe nobody at

Concordia reads *The Christian Century*, and so they don't know they are being left out. We think one or two people at Concordia read *Forum Letter*, and if they'd like to provide us with their current five best-sellers, we'd be glad to publish them here as supplemental information. — by *Richard O. Johnson*, associate editor

## Omnium gatherum



**Color-coded piety** ● Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, editor-elect of *Lutheran Forum* and pastor of the

Trenton, NJ St. John Lutheran Church, writes about her days as a Lutheran snob in the Easter issue of *The Cresset*, published out of Valparaiso University. In her younger years growing up in upstate New York, Lutherans were "a tiny bit exotic," a situation that invited snobbery.

I was a snob simply because I couldn't fathom why all people were not Lutheran. At the most they could be excused on the grounds of ignorance, but once they learned about us, surely they'd want to join up. What was preventing the madding crowds of the world from beating down our bright red doors?

Bright red doors? This is beyond me. I grew up in a church with simple plain brown doors, befitting the modest rolling plains of Eastern Kansas where a few equally modest Lutherans found themselves. My home church was and is to this day completely absent any hint of the socially-upward mobile decadence associated with snobby red doors. The Episcopalians may have had red doors, but they were Episcopalians and it was expected. Lutherans, though (and Methodists too, I recall), tended to avoid such showy displays of triumphal opulence. Proper piety, I suspect, is color-coded.

A delightful article, by the way, with a good punch to it.

**Statement on scripture** ● Lutheran CORE, an ELCA reform organization, has produced A

*Lutheran Statement on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Church* as a contribution to the five-year study on the role of scripture now underway in the ELCA. It is a very fine statement and you will find it at the website [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org) under "Statement on Scripture." Signatures are solicited, and if you are inclined after reading it, you may add yours by e-mail to: [L-CORE@charter.net](mailto:L-CORE@charter.net). I rather guess the statement will also appear at *Forum Online*, [www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org), sometime in the near future.

**Who is Lord?** ● Jesus is not Lord at St. Phillip's in the Hills Episcopal Church in Tucson, according to an April article in *The Arizona Daily Star*. At St. Phillip's, "Lord" has become a loaded word conveying hierarchical power over things, "which in what we have recorded in our sacred texts, is not who Jesus understood himself to be," said St. Phillip's associate rector Susan Anderson-Smith. Deacon Thomas Lindell added, "Our [worship] service has done everything it can to get rid of power imagery."

The Scripture from which they were not citing: "'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked. 'You call me "Master" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.'"

I think that would take care of the "power" thing at St. Phillip's in the Hills. Because it is otherwise always so, if Jesus is not Lord, another will seek his place. (See: [www.azstarnet.com/dailystar/179570](http://www.azstarnet.com/dailystar/179570))

**Barred like the other riffraff** ● What? The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau has been denied display space at the coming Houston

convention of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

Application — our first, I believe — was made through the director of general services for the LCMS and the application was denied because, the story went initially, our products might be in competition with Concordia Publishing House. Our president, Missouri Synod Pastor John Hannah pointed out that the ALPB presently has some 35 products compared to the gigazillion or so items that Concordia Publishing House generates annually. Besides, as President Hannah noted, Concordia Publishing House generously advertises many of its products through the pages of *Lutheran Forum*. So, like, what competition?

In reply President Hannah was told, “It is the belief of the application review committee that we have the right balance and mix of exhibitors for the convention at this time.” The ALPB would, by this judgment, upset the “right balance” within the “mix of exhibitors”?

So much for the direct approach. I backchanneled a couple of LCMS officials, elected guys, to see what they could sniff up. They were told, “If we let the ALPB in, we have to let everyone in.” “Everyone” in this case would include, uh, everyone? Even *Christian News*? We get barred like the other riffraff? Ooh, how humiliating.

So for the first time in the ALPB’s 93-year history, our application for a display has been denied.

Oh, alright. But so what if this is the only time in the ALPB’s 93-year history we’ve ever applied. It’s still the first time in our history we’ve been denied display space. It sounds better this way, more conspiratorially lurid, don’t you think? Besides, whatever, we still don’t get the space. And all we’d need really is a card table; maybe just a TV dinner tray.

But I have an idea. Do you think Concordia Publishing House could scrunch up a little area on the edge of one of their tables? The one at the very back, where the bouncers aren’t likely to see us?

**In the money** ● Speaking of publishing houses, Augsburg Fortress reported it finished 2006 with \$20,000 in operating income, the first time in many years the publisher completed its financial year in the black. This was on net sales of

\$44.3 million, some \$4 million more than initially projected. Much of the improved sales figures comes from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, some \$6.2 million, and sales of the new hymnal also seems to be fueling good reports for the first quarter of 2007. We have been highly critical of the ELCA publishing house over many issues, but still, CEO Beth Lewis has worked tirelessly at improving product lines and reestablishing AF as a Lutheran publishing house. The real test will come, of course, once *ELW* slackens and AF is back to relying on a publishing line that, while much better than just a couple years ago, is still kind of edgy. Nonetheless, any financial improvement at AF is to be welcomed.

**\$125-a-plate ordination** ● They’re doing it again. St. Francis Lutheran Church in San Francisco has sent out fancy invitations announcing “Ordination *Extraordinem*: According to apostolic tradition by the laying on of hands with prayer, Dawn Marie Roginski will be ordained to the Office of Word and Sacrament Ministry in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” This all takes place June 16. The ordinand, we are informed, is a Luther Seminary graduate “denied by the ELCA roster [sic] due to principled noncompliance with their discriminatory policy requiring celibacy for sexual minority clergy.” (First we’ve heard that the roster itself denies or approves anyone.) Of course no ELCA discipline is likely called for here, since St. Francis is an independent Lutheran congregation — albeit apparently one whose other pastor is, uh, accepted by the ELCA roster.

If you want to attend, you should also ask about tickets to the \$125-a-plate dinner at a swank Cathedral Hill hotel which follows. Fundraiser for Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries, you know (and you wondered where they get their money). For those of you who had to settle for an ordination pot-luck, well, tough. I’d say you just fell in with the wrong crowd.

**Wittrock scholarship fund** ● In 1948 Ted Wittrock became the executive secretary of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and did it for I don’t know how many years, and when he quit that I’m pretty sure he thereafter had a permanent seat on the board of directors. He was called in

1969 as pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in the Bronx, and remained vigorously so until his retirement in 2000 at the age of 80. Ted died July 4, 2002. One of the most pleasant shocks of my life was seeing him walk up to the door at Christ Lutheran Church, Stover, MO in the summer of 1994, shortly after I became pastor there. He was in town looking up old places from his childhood summers spent at his uncle's farm along the Haw Creek. Ted served three terms on the Concordia College New York board of regents and in 1991 was awarded Concordia's Servant of Christ award. Concordia has established The Rev. Theodore Wittrock Scholarship Fund, donations to which

may be sent to his daughter, Hope Wittrock, at 345 Old Church Road, Greenwich, CT 06830.

**Wife rocks** ● Dianne B. Saltzman, to whom I am related by marriage, received *summa cum laude* her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Avila University here in Kansas City, May 12. One of the area school districts promptly snapped her up to teach 4th grade beginning next term. While she is obviously an older, second-career graduate — and, just as obviously, I am self-disciplined enough to emphasize the second over the first — I wish to say clearly: Wife rocks.

## Third time and no charm



Good heavens, now how did this happen? Seventeen years as editor of *Forum Letter*. I have somehow held on to the job longer than my predecessors, Richard Koenig and Richard John Neuhaus, first and second editors, respectively.

I was worried at my appointment. The editor of *Forum Letter* would no longer carry the name Richard — something about third time and no charm. But the ALPB board bravely settled on a Russell. It has been ever since a pleasant, friendly, up-lifting and at times necessarily critical association I will always treasure. But 17 years? Really, this simply cannot go on.

The August issue will be my last as editor. I make this early announcement for readers so I may

sit back and await all the exultant correspondence that will surely overwhelm my desk in the intervening time. (Yeah, I know, the exultation might go either way, but I'm willing to accept the risk.)

As to my successor, the ALPB board reverted to precedent last month and appointed, yes, another Richard. Beginning with the September issue, I am delighted to say, Richard O. Johnson assumes the editorship of *Forum Letter*.

There is to be a Forum Dinner in my honor on Saturday, October 13th in the New York vicinity. Richard John Neuhaus, the second editor of *Forum Letter*, will be the speaker. Time, cost, and place to be announced later.

And my real farewell will appear in the August issue. — *by the editor*

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