FORUM LETTER

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We offer up our ministries

"At whatever point we are in ministry, whether we are just starting out or are veterans of visions lost and visions only partially fulfilled, we are at a point of change, of formation, of potentiality, of promise. The harder we work at this ministry, the less easily satisfied we are with ourselves. The more we know the value of the treasure, the more keenly we know the earthenness of the vessel. . . . At the beginning and at the end of every day, we offer up our ministries. We are responsible for the offering, and God is responsible for the consequences, and his is the infinitely greater responsibility. We tinker and tune and experiment and resolve and fail and try again, in the happy assurance that, when all is said and done, it is the awesome recklessness of his love and not our ambition that called us to the seeming absurdity of this work. Because of our infidelities, we have a lot to answer for. Because of his promise, God has a lot more to answer for. 'Even when we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself' (2 Tim. 2). We affirm our place in the tradition of fidelity, and of infidelity, that is the Church. In that tradition we proclaim the presence of the One who seems to be absent. We are the stewards of the mysteries of his presence, and of his absence." —Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Harper & Row, 1979)

Farewell to a friend

What *Forum Letter* is today is probably due to Richard John Neuhaus as much as to anyone else. Neuhaus was the *Letter*'s second editor, serving in that capacity from 1974 to 1990. Shortly after his resignation from *FL* he announced his decision to enter the Roman Catholic Church, but he remained a friend of *Forum Letter*. He read it regularly, and occasionally quoted it in *First Things*, the journal he founded in 1990. I am among those who were introduced to Neuhaus's writing through *Forum Letter*, and who, when he left *FL,* continued to subscribe to his new publishing ventures (as well, of course, to *FL* even without him). Agree or disagree with him about particular issues, he never failed to make one think, and think more clearly than might otherwise be the case.

And so this special double issue of *Forum Letter* is dedicated to the memory of former editor and respected colleague, Richard John Neuhaus, who died January 8. We have asked a number of Lutheran writers, journalists and theologians to share their memories of Fr. Neuhaus; and we have culled through his sixteen years of editing *Forum Letter* to find some quotations that we think represent, at least in part, the scope and nature of his contribution to Christ's church

as a Lutheran. Those were significant years in our history: from the travails of the LCMS to the formation of the ELCA. Neuhaus's commentary was often sharp, generally prescient, sometimes weary. It was always written out of a deep love for Christ and his church. But it was, most importantly, read and digested and taken to heart by a good many Lutherans. If neither the LCMS nor the ELCA turned out to be the full manifestation of what he called a "confessing movement within the church catholic," it is undeniable that his vision remains in the hearts of many who continue to fight for that movement within North American Lutheranism.

by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Neuhaus remembered

by Russell E. Saltzman

His death is still raw as I write these notes on the day of his funeral, too raw and too intrusive. I set up a Google news alert on the Tuesday of his death to see what was being said of him. After a day I turned it off. The notices were too oppressive; I could not confront his absence that way. Every word brought another stab of loss. My grief could not accommodate the confrontation with obituaries. I frankly find my eyes filling with tears at unbidden times, thinking that in this life I shall never again see him, talk with him, or drink that gawd-awful decaffeinated espresso he liked.

Others will remark at length on his intellectual legacy and do a better job of it than I. Of course, he will be remembered for the significance of his thought and for his influence upon America and the church, and equally for the lasting impact of *The Naked Public Square*, a phrase he single handedly added to our political lexicon, the place where, according to one commentator, all discussion about religion and civic life begins and ends. There is all that to remember, and much more.

But for me, I lost a great friend and mentor, a personal support and a friendly critic. His life punctuated my own. This is what I shall remember: my life is infinitely better for having known him.

Fortuitous stumbling

I encountered Richard when I was a seminarian in the late 1970s. I stumbled across *Lutheran Forum* in the Trinity Seminary library, and from there stumbled further into *Forum Letter*, and further yet into the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. I had no clue who the guy was, but he was saying stuff I sure liked to read. He was then winding down his "liberal" period. I didn't share much of that sentiment, but what he could say about the catholicity of the Lutheran confessions in those years was a positive thrill.

My faculty advisor, the late Walter Bouman, didn't think much of Neuhaus when I mentioned *Forum Letter*. I gather it was personal. My relationship to Bouman was such that his dismissal simply added keener incentive to learn as much as I could about Neuhaus, *Forum Letter*, and the ALPB, and to throw it up to Bouman as frequently as possible in conversation. It was in seminary I began a periodic correspondence with Richard. I did not meet him personally until a 1983 theological conference, just after my appointment to the ALPB board of directors. We shared a room and there I discovered he made puppy noises in his sleep (something I promised to never reveal during his lifetime).

Vignettes

My memories of and about him this week come tumbled in bits and pieces, vignettes of recollection going back now 30 years:

► His diary, the part he let me read, wherein I learned that at some point prior to his 1990 move to Roman Catholicism, his Lutheran bishop, the late William Lazareth, was telling him his status as an ELCA pastor was in jeopardy. Richard did not have a parish call with the required half-time minimum of 20 hours per week. He was then listed as a pastor's assistant at Immanuel Lutheran on East 88th, a non-stipendiary call with no responsibilities save an occasional sermon. He remarked in the diary, it was a poor thing to have a bishop with such a limited understanding of ordination and call. Aloud he speculated whether the interest in his call status was being

pushed locally or if it was due to something out of Chicago. I never asked, so I don't know directly if that had any bearing on his decision for Rome, though it is hard to imagine that it did not have some influence, if only to confirm a choice already made.

► He shanghaied me to a fixtures store where he spent maybe 60 minutes examining a rather heavy floor lamp for his dining area. Then he had me help carry it maybe 50, 60 blocks. He took the light end and I had the rear, me doing a huff-and-puff to keep up with that block-a-minute New York pace. Afterwards he complained I slowed him down. When I complained about the distance, he insisted it was no more than 40 blocks.

► He had a whimsical side. While carrying this lamp, he stops us in front of a kitchen gadget store, leaving me on the sidewalk, and comes back out with what he describes as the world's best knife sharpener. He hands it to me as a gift for my wife. And he's right. It is a very good knife sharpener, maybe even the world's best.

► One Lent I decided to give up cigars. I'm all set Ash Wednesday. That morning in the mail is a package from Neuhaus containing several cartons of Between The Acts, a cigar we both liked. He's giving up cigars for Lent, he says in his note, and thinks I can make use of his extra cartons.

► A dinner conversation over lamb chops, I remember, that included my two youngest daughters. He and Joanie, then 13, discuss why no lambs are ever featured as protagonists in children's stories. I don't recall their conclusion, only the manner in which he included my children in the conversation.

► Some years back I was in New York while he was elsewhere and I got the use of his apartment, and the chore of babysitting his dog, Sammy II. A big, lumbering, friendly mutt, ugly as sin with a whip-like tail, who jumped up in bed with me and would not budge. I accused Neuhaus of spoiling the dog. Richard says the dog had never before jumped into bed and, obviously, she found a willing patsy that one time.

► He let the dog drink out of the toilet. I remarked on this. "It's a matter of perspective," he pointed out. "Sammy might ask, why are you peeing in her water bowl?"

► His apartment bathroom is festooned with memorabilia. Photos of Neuhaus with this president, and another president, and this pope, and that cardinal before he became pope; several awards and countless commendations for one achievement or another. He hung them in the bathroom, he often said, because while he wanted to show them off, the location would indicate he just didn't take himself all that seriously. He also included the photos of children given to him by friends with children, mine among them. He kept those in the bathroom too so he would see them daily and remember to pray for them.

► I had far too much to drink one night and fretfully wondered that the room was beginning to spin. "Don't worry," he told me. "The room always starts to spin this time of night."

► A critic responding to my *Forum Letter* coverage of the ELCA constituting convention mockingly gave me the "Richard Neuhaus Write-A-Like Award." To be compared in any way to Neuhaus, well, I'm good with that.

Disappointment

If I ever disappointed him, it was not going to Rome with him. A mutual friend told me, Neuhaus never understood why I didn't "get it." What I did get was that Neuhaus broke the evangelical catholic movement in American Lutheranism. The conserving tradition of reformed orthodox catholicity sputtered on for awhile after his departure; it may sputter on still for a while. But the movement lost the intellectual vigor that Neuhaus gave. Today we are still dealing with the residue of his departure.

The sequence of events went like this. By June 1990 when the first St. Olaf "Call to Faithfulness" conference was held, I had been named, though not publicly, as Richard's successor at *Forum Letter*. Richard made the announcement in preface to his presentation at the conference. The conference was concluded; Richard did his final July 1990 issue summarizing the event. Then, when my first August 1990 issue as editor had gone to press, Paul Hinlicky, ALPB executive director at the time, telephoned to say that Richard was joining the Roman Catholic Church.

I had no reaction but utter shock, sharply expressed in a flurry of Anglo-Saxon crudities. And betrayal. That was one word that came to mind. I

had asked Richard, was he planning to pull a Newman when he was no longer editor? No. By the next day, when Richard himself called, I was calmer. He was my friend, I loved him, that's what I said. I still believe that when he said no, no Rome, he meant it in the moment. There is a grant of trust between friends.

Left behind

But I was still stuck trying to figure out what his departure would mean for those like me left behind. I now think it is clear. It meant the end of evangelical catholicism as a serious intellectual enterprise in theology and parish practice for American Lutheranism. Some will assess my view as overly pessimistic. I hope they are right. I fear they are not. With the ELCA slowly imploding and about to undergo a sex-change operation, and the LCMS still mired in Biblicist literalism, what voice of counsel is there today? The question I asked in my second issue of *Forum Letter*, assessing Richard's departure, must still be asked today: does evangelical catholicism properly lead to Rome? And if it does not, why not?

Richard delivered the keynote remarks at the 2007 ALPB dinner marking my departure as *Forum Letter* editor. His presence put the issue uppermost in my mind. Had the ALPB chosen any other speaker that evening my remarks would not have been so pointedly addressed to Neuhaus. Indeed, I would have found another topic altogether. But in that moment, I asserted there are still good reasons for remaining Lutheran, and I listed them. Over dinner the next evening, which included my formerly Roman Catholic wife, Richard shot down each of my points and glumly pronounced my arguments ultimately failed. So, yes, if I ever did disappoint him, it was on being Catholic.

I tried to tell him that night—wherever the Catholic thing shook out—how much I treasured his friendship, tried to explain what his life meant for mine, attempted to say how deep my respect went and how warm my regard was for him. Looking back on that last evening, I want to say I had a premonition it would be the last time I would see him. But I had no premonition like that. I rather assumed there'd be another night on his sofa, some time yet in the future.

If ever he disappointed me, surely it was this: dying too soon at seventy-two. The world was orderly with him in it, and I feel as if, well, twice now he has left me behind.

Russell E. Saltzman is the immediate past editor of Forum Letter*, pastor of Ruskin Heights Lutheran Church in Kansas City, and religion columnist for the* Long Island Sentinel*, a new online publication of the Keating Reports.*

A man of many parts

by Gilbert C. Meilaender

Richard John Neuhaus was a man of many parts, many connections, and many talents. All of these, however, were unified by his deep, abiding commitment to the church. The fact that this commitment eventually took him from Lutheranism to Roman Catholicism stands as a challenge to Lutherans.

As both Lutheran and Catholic he was a master of what I liked to call "high-level theological gossip." One can see that mastery at work both in his years of editing *Forum Letter* and in his Public Square column that played such an essential role in the pages of *First Things*. The writing was gossipy in a good sense; it was pointed, ironic, witty, and polemical; and with all that it was theologically astute. Perhaps we should not say of any human being that he cannot be replaced. Or perhaps we should say of every human being that he cannot be replaced. But somewhere between those two God's-eye assessments, it seems obvious to me that there is no one on the current scene who can do what Richard did in both his Lutheran and his Catholic years.

So much better

If he was primarily a speaker, preacher, and master of the short piece of high-level theological gossip, it is nonetheless true that some of his books were very important. *The Naked Public Square*, writ-

ten during his Lutheran years, was and continues to be an enormously influential book. One could hardly be surprised that its author founded an Institute on "Religion and Public Life." But the claim that a naked public square, denuded of religion, is a bad thing challenges a certain Lutheran tendency to set the two kingdoms in splendid isolation from each other. It challenges also our society's permissive attitude toward abortion--*the issue* which perhaps more than any other motivated the movement of Richard's life both politically and ecclesiastically.

Pastoral theology

Still, the book of Richard's that has meant the most to me is not any, such as *The Naked Public Square*, written on political and cultural themes. Nor is it any of the probing theological works—one thinks of *Death on a Friday Afternoon*—written in his Catholic years. It is, rather, *Freedom for Ministry*—a book primarily for pastors, published in 1979 and written as he put it in "A Word to the Reader," "in the year after my departure from the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Brooklyn." Although marked in some respects by the time at which it was written, this book about the church and the office of the ministry is so much better than much of what passes for practical or pastoral theology that one can unhesitatingly recommend it still today.

Indeed, when I learned that Richard had died, my way of honoring his memory was to take *Freedom for Ministry* off the shelf and begin rereading it. Even if we did not know that its author had left the Lutheran ministry to become a Roman Catholic priest, it would still challenge a good bit of what passes for Lutheranism in our country. The concluding chapter—titled more in Catholic or Wesleyan than Lutheran fashion, "The Pursuit of Holiness"—gets, I think, to the heart of what Richard Neuhaus really cared about. How much we can still learn from it.

Bad theological habit

Noting that Lutheran use of the language of "paradox" had "degenerated into a bad theological habit," he wrote: "Better than the language of paradox is the language of pilgrimage." And he quotes Titus 2: "The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, *training us* to . . . live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope." If we regret that Richard felt compelled to leave Lutheranism and become Roman Catholic, a fitting expression of that regret would be for us to take—individually and corporately—the pursuit of holiness as central to Lutheran theology.

"Even the sparrow finds a home," the psalmist says. Richard was fond of saying that becoming a Roman Catholic was, for him, like coming home. Yet, as he surely knew, it was only a penultimate home, and not the one he now—as neither Lutheran nor Catholic—enjoys in Christ.

Gilbert C. Meilaender is chair of the Department of Theology at Valparaiso University. He is an LCMS pastor and a noted writer, with a particular interest in the field of bioethics.

An extraordinary friend

by James Nuechterlein

It's hard to believe he's gone. We say that when someone important to us dies. In the case of my extraordinary friend and colleague Richard John Neuhaus, it's more than a verbal reflex. He had more life in him than anyone I've ever known, and I find it difficult to accept that it has all been taken away. Whatever the sins for which he will be held to account, there can't be many of omission. There was little in Richard's life that was left undone.

So much about him was outsize: the lightning intelligence, the effortless mastery of the spoken and written word, the commanding presence, the neo-Stakhanovite work ethic, the bottomless self-confidence. All this made him a natural leader. He attached himself to a great many causes and organizations over the years, and more often than not he wound up running them. He was one of the handful of people I have ever known to whom the word "charismatic" properly applied.

Autobiographical revisionism

Through his books, articles, speeches, and, after 1990, the journal *First Things*, he became the leading intellectual spokesman of theological orthodoxy and cultural conservatism in American public life. He had not always located himself in the place he finally came to occupy. As with most people, he liked to emphasize the continuities in his life and thought, but that required—his consistent pro-life commitment notably aside—a certain amount of autobiographical revisionism. As a young Lutheran pastor and antiwar activist he flirted with the social gospel and more than flirted with political radicalism.

The religious shift from Lutheran to Catholic was less marked in substance, but more significant in effect, than the political movement from Left to Right. There was little in common between the would-be revolutionary that he was in his political youth and the defender of American tradition that he became in his later years. His religious transition did not involve an equivalent reordering of his theological beliefs. His was essentially an ecclesial conversion. He viewed it as a fulfillment, under exigent circumstances, of what he had always been—a catholic Christian—and not as a reconstruction of his religious universe. (Some of his Catholic parishioners complained that his sermons were "too Lutheran.") Yet the move from Lutheran pastor to Catholic priest affected his sense of self far more radically than had his reversal of political allegiances.

Passions and priorities

No political allegiance had remotely the claim on Richard's passions and priorities as did God and the things of God. When he wrote in the premiere issue of *First Things* that the first thing to be said of public life is that public life is not the first thing, he meant what he said. So also in his sense of who he was. Richard took pride in his role as public intellectual, but at the core of his being was his identity as priestly servant of the Church of Christ. As a Catholic priest he could combine his religious and secular vocations in a way that, for a number of reasons, was no longer sustainable for him within Lutheranism.

Richard never did anything by halves, and, once determined that he should become a priest, he flourished as a priest. When he told me, one early summer day in 1990, that he had decided to become a Catholic, we had what diplomats politely call a full and frank exchange of views. For those of us who remain evangelical catholics within the Lutheran tradition his was and remained a grievous loss.

But over time I became persuaded, however reluctantly, that the decision was for him the right one, even if it could not be so for me. (Father Richard, good priest that he was, never bought that last part.) He had come home as a Catholic, fully accepting Rome's claim that it was, as he so often repeated, the Church of Jesus Christ most fully and rightly ordered through time.

As a Lutheran pastor, Richard was always somewhat discontent, a perpetual rebel against all forms of ecclesial authority. In the Catholic Church he finally found an authority, personified in his beloved bishop John Cardinal O'Connor and in the pontificate of John Paul II, to which he could fully and wholeheartedly accede. That gave his life a center and a stability it had not had before.

Something beautiful for God

Even as it was religion, not politics, that most mattered to him, so I think—though this is not the common view—that it was in theology he did his best and most important work. *The Naked Public Square*, his most noted book, is an influential political statement on the folly of excluding religion and religiously based morality from public life. But it is in his devotional works, *As I Lay Dying* and, above all, *Death on a Friday Afternoon,* that one finds the deepest resonance. He spoke often, late at night, of wanting to do something beautiful for God, and in *Death on a Friday Afternoon* he did it.

It was Richard who made possible for me the high adventure of working at *First Things* and living as a member of the Community of Christ on East 19th Street. I will always be grateful for that, and I will remember life and work with him as an incomparable blessing. He had a gift, unparalleled in my experience, for making life memorable. For those of us who loved him, life without him will be a diminished thing.

James Nuechterlein, a senior fellow of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, was editor of First Things *from 1990 to 2004.*

All things Richard

by Charles Austin

First, I wrote to him.
Later, I wrote for him.
Eventually, I wrote about him.

I was a young pastor in Dubuque, Iowa. There were four American Lutheran Church churches, two Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregations, and my Lutheran Church in America parish. My pastoral concerns were renewal of the liturgy, improved inter-Lutheran and ecumenical relations, especially with Roman Catholics, and a Christian critique on social issues such as racism and the Vietnam war.

It was tough going. A weekly Eucharist was not common. The ALC and LCMS were in altar and pulpit fellowship, so I had to be excluded from joint worship at community celebrations, or the LCMS parishes would not participate. Lutheran—Roman Catholic dialogue was lush, thanks to the Dominicans at Aquinas Institute School of Theology and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Mt. Carmel Convent. But many Protestants were suspicious of those who spent too much time with Catholics.

Some Quakers held a regular Sunday vigil protesting the war, but critical reflection on war was scarce. A Presbyterian minister, an Episcopal priest and I scheduled discussions and set up a draft counseling service, taking a good bit of heat.

Advice to a naïve young pastor

Feeling besieged, I wrote Richard, whose writings on inter-Lutheran and ecumenical relations were well known and who was a founder of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam. I wish I had saved the correspondence. His advice to a naïve young pastor was: pray, study, work, and remember that it doesn't all depend upon you. Remember, too, he said, that pastoral ministry is hard. Hang in there. I heard the words of someone like me who understood what I was experiencing.

A few years later in New York, as a staff writer for Religion News Service and later as a newsman with the Lutheran Council USA, a cooperative agency of the LCA, ALC and LCMS, I would occasionally write for Richard and contribute articles to *Forum Letter*. We would have long conversations about deteriorating relations between the Lutheran church bodies. LCMS had broken fellowship with the ALC over the ordination of women, and the Concordia Seminary faculty was being expelled. Thinking back, I believe I sensed that Richard was wearying of the general state of American Lutheranism, with Missouri going one direction and the ALC and LCA heading another.

What have you done?

When Richard's evolving thought aligned him with the Institute of Religion and Democracy as a harsh critic of mainline churches, especially the National Council of Churches, I covered the controversy for *The New York Times*. Now I was writing about Richard. And we had a less-than-memorable 7-1/2 minutes together on the "Today Show" one morning, discussing the controversy.

When Richard became a Roman Catholic priest, I wrote a "what-have-you-done?" op-ed article that ran in several newspapers, alongside Richard's explanation of why he did it.

Throughout this time I developed a high regard for Richard's intelligence, commitment to the Church and ability to pull together various strains of thought. I've interviewed many top theologians and high-ranking church officials, and few had Richard's grasp of so many topics. But I was not agreeing with some of his conclusions.

As a parish pastor, I was invited to some of the soirees in Richard's Manhattan apartment. The food, drink and discussion was abundant and the participants enthusiastic. Richard, the star of the evening, would eventually pull the conversation into a sometimes lengthy discourse about just how he thought things should be.

All things Richard

I always felt that there should have been more serious challenges to his analyses and conclusions, but many there were devotees of all things Richard, and after all, he was the host.

Richard's faith journey meant that he would travel a path that is not the one I continue to tread. I remain puzzled by aspects of the road he followed and wish we had been able to "preserve" him as a

voice within Lutheranism. But his voice was preserved within the church catholic and his faith, insight, commitment and wit reached a broader group in the latter days of his ministry.

I am grateful for the ways that he influenced and continues to influence my views on that which he loved so dearly: the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

A retired pastor of the ELCA, Charles Austin served parishes in Iowa, New York and New Jersey, and was director of news for the Lutheran Council in the USA and later for the LCA, and English Editor for the Lutheran World Federation. He has also been a secular journalist, covering religion for The New York Times, The Record of Hackensack, *and other news services.*

Rare grace

by Richard E. Koenig

Lutheranism seldom gets a mention in the secular news media. Ironically, the day when Fr. Richard John Neuhaus died was an exception. There were an astonishing number of notices of his passing, many (not all) laudatory, but most of them proclaiming with a flourish that Neuhaus was a former Lutheran pastor. He was originally ordained, as most *Forum Letter* readers must know, in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He served St. John the Evangelist Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, where my great-grandfather Beyer was once pastor. Fr. Neuhaus and I were both members of the Atlantic District during the years of the controversy over the Bible that engulfed the LCMS in the 1960s and '70s. I always felt that his support for the moderate cause was rather tepid, even after I surrendered editorship of *Forum Letter* to him following the rout of the moderates by the conservatives at the LCMS's New Orleans convention in 1971. Although I did not see it coming, I was not surprised when he was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1990.

Upon his secession I bade him farewell in an open letter that was printed in *The Christian Century.* Now it is time for me to bid him farewell once again, this time a final farewell as he is received into the company of the great cloud of witnesses that urge all of us on as Christians who are yet running the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, the faith we share as baptized Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

Pugnacious ultramontanism

Much has been made of Fr. Neuhaus's vigorous, even pugnacious, ecclesiastical ultramontanism and political neo-conservatism. It is really more important for Lutherans to consider what both he and Jaroslav Pelikan gave as the reason for their secession from Lutheranism: that the church into which they were baptized was no longer a reform movement within the Church catholic but had become simply another American denomination. I take that to mean that both men came to the conclusion that Lutheranism in this country failed in "ecclesial density."

Lutherans, in other words, have lost those characteristics that make a church "Church": a careful attention to the Great Tradition of catholic doctrine, especially Christology; a valid ministry; worship that is grounded in Word and Sacrament; and a robust teaching of justification by faith that informs and grounds the church's outreach and witness. It would be salutary and instructive for us who have remained Lutherans to give attention to the range and theological acuity that characterizes the works of these two ex-Lutherans in their separate fields of inquiry, and ask ourselves how our theological products compare.

A self-taught man

Fr. Neuhaus is almost universally praised for his written works, from *First Things*, the journal he founded and published, to the numerous books he authored. He was a voracious reader; there seemed to be nothing said or done with implications for the church and the faith that did not draw his peremptory comments. Yet he did all this without the benefit of formal education beyond that which he received from the LCMS preparatory system and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This was a man who

was self-taught on an enormous range of topics. What a mind was his, to enter the lists in debate on a multitude of subjects, and with such erudition, absent any further academic study. He was a phenomenon, without doubt.

Fr. Neuhaus once told me at the very beginning of his ministry that he intended to be a great man. To many he was, but perhaps in a way he never envisioned. Among the encomiums heaped upon him, the one that caught my attention was the column by David Brooks of the *New York Times* (a paper Neuhaus scorned) on how he dealt with his impending death. There was indeed a rare and unusual grace in his honest confrontation with death, a glimpse of the mystery of life that is given us when we look at death with unblinking courage and faith.

Richard Koenig, a retired ELCA pastor, was the first editor of Forum Letter. He subsequently edited *Partners* and then *Lutheran Partners.*

In the peace of Christ

by Larry Bailey

Although I had met Richard John Neuhaus when I was in college and at Concordia, St. Louis, it wasn't until he returned from his long trip to Africa in 1971 that our friendship began to grow. He had moved out of the rectory at St. John the Evangelist to an apartment not too far from the church. It was a small but charming place and he enjoyed having friends over for conversation and dinner. To that end he asked me if I would prepare those meals.

Out of those moments grew his desire to find a place where there could be something of a community, a place where people lived, prayed, and ate together. In 1979 he moved—first—into what is frequently called "338" (after the house address). A few months later I followed him there and we began to pray together each evening and have a meal on Saturday night.

Great guests

Over the years other men and women came and joined with us as space became available (read up on how to free-up an occupied apartment in New York City!). Without exception those who made up the Community of Christ in the City (to use its full title) reaped the benefit of prayer, fellowship, and Father Richard's wit and wisdom. Guests at prayer and dinner became more and more the norm and they ran the gamut of the greats to almost the greatest (he never could get Pope John Paul II to join us) to the mere great—Robert Louis Wilken, Avery Dulles, and a list simply too long for this column.

Most of all he liked having the young interns from *First Things* in the house, at prayer, and at dinner. One thing that struck me after the funeral was the number of times people said or wrote to the effect that they had never experienced the beauty and majesty of Evening Prayer from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. We continued to use *LBW* even after Neuhaus was received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church, for reasons I'm not at liberty to divulge. There was nothing precious about the doing; prayer is its own beauty.

As he lay dying, one of his last wishes was that the Community, and especially prayer and fellowship, should continue after his death.He had hoped, he said, that God would grant him another decade or more. He had a few more books to write (A few? I bet he did!). All who worked or lived in his presence surely could see his love for Christ and his Bride. Never was this more acutely evident than during the times of what he called the "Long Lent." At times he visibly suffered from what was happening.

On the Wednesday before he died, I came to the hospital to pray with him, to pray for him, and to say goodbye. He died in the peace that Christ died for him, that he was united to his Savior in Baptism and in the Holy Mass, that choirs of angels awaited him (and all who died in Christ), along with Lazarus who was once poor. May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of Christ rest in peace.

Larry Bailey is an ELCA pastor; he teaches at Our Savior Lutheran High School (LCMS) in the Bronx.

Rabbi Neuhaus

by David H. Benke

I'm heading down Bushwick Avenue, on the way to the rectory at St. John the Evangelist for my first Wednesday evening gathering with Richard John Neuhaus and the Lutheran pastors of North Brooklyn, sometime in 1975, and I'm thinking, "Don't say anything. Keep your mouth shut and listen." Good advice for a young pastor in his first parish anyway.

But once inside the door and ensconced in the smoke-filled room, I find (young pastor trying to hide in the woodwork) that the gift waiting to be uncovered within me was the gift of repartee, conversational back-and-forth, engagement with the critical ideas and strategies necessary for the movement of the Gospel into the world through the office of the holy ministry. Richard John Neuhaus was a social rarity—he certainly loved to hear himself talk, but he really wasn't happy unless you were talking, too.

Finding my voice

So the newbies and the ill-equipped were asked their opinions on Eucharistic practice, or abortion, or hospital visitation, or vestment selection, or where grace is found in the means of grace, or what the mayor or the governor needed to hear from the Lutheran church, just the same as the seasoned veterans who had their ducks in order. So I was encouraged to find my voice on night one, and on all the Wednesdays following. My vocal training in the holy things of God as duly ordained and set apart began there, and returns there even yet and always will.

I would return from those weekly "*conviviums*" smelling all of cigar smoke and scotch. And Judy would welcome me with less than totally open arms, thankful at least that I'd gotten back safely, muttering that she hadn't figured pastors got a "boys' night out."

After we batted around the truths that yes, it was all boys (which changed a little bit through the later years), and yes (my point of view), cigars and scotch were conversational and health aids, the bottom line remained. I was going to return every Wednesday. And I was being made a more fit pastor of the Church for returning.

How does anyone learn about the pastoral ministry, that most daunting, demanding, detailed art? You need a rabbi, a teacher, somebody who's on your side, who brings out the you in you and eventually the best in you, the Christ in you, over your own objections. Richard John Neuhaus was that rabbi for me and for what—thousands? Millions? We were, in our Brooklyn or Manhattan versions, always a *convivium fraternum* of rabbis, a warren of seekers after a dessert portion of wisdom from on high. RJN's distilled, raconteur's special, last best opinion on everything was invariably the dollop of cream at the top .

An incredible circle

The real deal with Richard John Neuhaus was that if you were in his circle, if you were a friend, you were a friend for life. You had, I had, we all had, a good friend, a true friend, a friend to whom you could and would always turn. The amazing thing for all of us to realize was how incredibly big a circle he drew with his life. It was a circle of grace, and hope, and love, anchored in Christ, our Lord. With whom he is joined with all the saints and angels in light perpetual.

When I was privileged to greet Benedict XVI at St. Joseph's parish in Manhattan in the spring of 2008, I dialed Richard John's cell phone from out on an East side street before entering the sanctuary. He was getting ready for his own EWTN commentary. I wanted an excuse to ask him something so for a change I could tell him something. So I asked with what title a local Lutheran bishop should greet the Pope. "Why, David, that's simply *pro forma.* The pope is to be greeted, 'Your holiness.'"

The smiling Pope

This was just the set-up for me to say, "In my greeting, I'm going to mention you to Benedict." Richard, understanding as he would, responded, "Go ahead with your plan. It may bring a smile to his face." And so, the early greeting accomplished, I entered the dialog with the Pope in April 2008 by saying, "We share a mutual friend, Father Richard

John Neuhaus."

Check the videotape. His holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, grinning from ear to ear, going, "Ah, yes, Father Neuhaus."

Yes indeed. He convened an incredible circle of friends.

David H. Benke is pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York, and president of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

In his own words: RJN in *Forum Letter,* 1974-1990

Spiritual formation

Time was, not long ago, when the idea of "spiritual formation" was viewed with grave suspicion in some Lutheran circles. It would seem natural enough that future pastors should learn to pray, but things are not always what they seem. Some said theological seminaries should be graduate schools of academic excellence, and nothing more. Prayer, liturgy and spiritual growth were strictly extracurricular. There was for a time a lively discussion of the subject between the LCA seminary in Philadelphia ("sterile academia") and the one in Gettysburg ("anti-intellectual pietism"). The differences were exaggerated, of course, but nonetheless real, nor were they limited to those two schools. Now President Robert Marshall, in a recent letter to LCA clergy, suggests striking a better balance. "It used to be that people just naturally brought a piety or a sentimentality to worship. Our duty then was to add some theological rationality. . . . We should not set the spiritual and the intellectual against each other. …We have been so caught up in psychological, sociological and organizational vocabularies (because they carried stimulating new insights) that devotional vocabularies grew stale." Looking at the larger Church, Marshall adds, "We have to give the Roman Catholics some credit here. They have a facility for spiritual expression that we often lack. They are more ready to speak of prayer and the devotional life in Christ than are the Protestants I meet in the ecumenical movement." It seems our seminaries—and our parishes—could use an injection of what long ago were called "Romanizing tendencies." (Dec., 1974)

Complete doctrinal unity?

At the heart of Missouri's troubles is not the doctrine of Scripture but, many believe, the doctrine of the Church. The issue is not whether there are theological differences but whether we can stay in one church body to discuss and debate such differences. Against this possibility stands a stream of Missouri tradition that says "complete doctrinal unity" is essential to fellowship. This assumes in turn a notion of the "invisible Church" that makes it less than imperative that we be together in one "visible Church." The linkage between complete doctrinal unity and church fellowship was, long years ago under Walther and others, enforced by bonds of trust and shared immigrant experience. Now that those bonds have weakened, it must be enforced, if enforced it is to be, by legislation and by coercion. (Aug., 1975)

But how does he really feel?

We've been asked whether we've stopped reading *The Lutheran,* since in recent months there has been no comment on the more egregious gaffes in the column, "My question is . . . " In fact we noticed them but thought we should hold back for a time, giving the editors opportunity for repentance and amendment of life. Apparently that tactic isn't working. Recent issues have included these claims: Lutherans, like Roman Catholics, use a conditional formula when uncertain about whether a person has been baptized (wrong); the candelabra at the altar are for eucharistic liturgies and the two single candles for noneucharistic use (almost precisely the opposite is true); Lutherans don't have the sacrament of penance because penance is included in Baptism (explicitly refuted by the Lutheran confessional writings). There are others, but suffice it that "My question is . . ." keeps its distinction as the most consistent source of popular misinformation about worship and the sacraments in American Lutheranism. (May, 1978)

For some reason, *Lighten Our Darkness* by Douglas John Hall (Westminster Press) has been get-

ting a big play in some Lutheran circles. Maybe because Lutherans like the phrase "theology of the cross" which is in its subtitle. We have several times been asked our opinion. For what it's worth, the book seems to us rhetorically impressive but theologically insubstantial. (June, 1978)

On ecclesiastical affiliations

There have been some published comments and more personal inquiries about the absence of your editor's name from the newly issued clergy roster of the AELC. . . . The current understanding at Trinity, Lower East Side, Manhattan, is that the pastors are members of AELC and it is left to officials in Missouri to sever the connection with LCMS, if that is their wish. Thus, like many others, we are in the category of "dual membership" presumably forbidden by the Dallas convention of LCMS last year. . . . Rightwingers in the LCMS claim dual membership is dishonest and immoral. We believe it is an honest response to an ambiguous situation created by the immoral actions of Missouri's officialdom. . . . Admittedly, there is no entirely satisfactory answer. Given several loyalties in tension, our choice seems to be, at the moment, a less unsatisfactory answer than some others. . . . Although unsatisfactory, we do not find "dual membership" a source of great anxiety. Ecclesial alignments are always unsatisfactory, which is another reason for praying for the coming of the Kingdom. (May, 1978)

Beyond thought-slots

Wherever I go, the question is asked whether I am more radical or more conservative than I was in the '60s. It is the kind of question that, in search of definitions, turns itself back upon the questioner. I am generally disinclined to bore people with intellectual autobiography, and that for two reasons. First, it panders to the desire of non-thinkers for updated thought-slots, so that they can continue to "situate" themselves on the spectrum of viewpoints without having to work through the questions involved. Second, the public tracing of the minutiae of one's mental movements may imply an unwarranted sense of self-importance.

But, since some of you ask (others should feel free to skip what follows), herewith a brief response. During the '60s I was viewed as an unqualified liberal or even radical. . . . Those were the years of intense engagement in civil rights, urban change issues and the antiwar movement. Faced with the same issues, I hope I would, in general, do now what I did then. I was not then as comfortable with the labels applied to me as were those who—whether in approval or opposition—applied them. Remember that *Movement and Revolution,* written at the end of the '60s from "a radical perspective," was a cautionary tract in which I aimed at those who were trivializing the meaning and costs of real revolution in America.

In 1967 I published in *Commonweal,* the liberal Catholic journal, "Abortion: The Dangerous Assumptions." That was at the height of the furor over "liberalized" abortion in New York, long before the disastrous 1973 Supreme Court decision. The article . . . ruptured friendships with many friends on the left. One always knew, but it was painful to experience, the truth that there is also a liberal party line that it is deemed treason to violate. . . .

There were other fissures on the left. One had to do with what was then called the counterculture. Many of us saw "the Movement" of the '60s as the quest for justice for the poor. Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and many others saw it in terms of the cultural liberation, especially the sexual and pharmaceutical liberation, of the children of the privileged. There was yet another fissure that ran throughout the years of antiwar protest. On the one side were those of us who thought the U.S. war policy unjustified, and therefore immoral. . . . On the other side were those who made no secret of their enthusiasm for the "liberation" forces of Hanoi. . . . . That division became utterly clear in 1976 when some of us organized a statement of protest against massive violations of human rights by the then triumphant Hanoi regime. Approximately 200 people prominent in the antiwar movement were asked to sign, and about 100 did. The others refused to violate "socialist solidarity." Then and now they would publicly acknowledge "no enemies to the left."

So have I moved left or right, or at all? In terms of conventional thought-slots, the movement appears to be rightward. So much for the conventional thought-slots. Comparing, say, 1965 with 1979, it is not surprising that I see clear continuity. I was then and am now a pragmatist economically, a liberal politically and a conservative culturally. . . .

So when people ask whether you're neo-

conservative or conservative, neo-liberal or liberal, radical or revolutionary, my advice is not to sweat for an answer. . . . If they insist on putting your views into one thought-slot or another, well, that is their compulsion and not your responsibility.

One final word, and it is really the most important word. . . . I have always been most acutely aware that I am, first and last, a Christian of catholic persuasion, a pastor and a churchman held accountable by a tradition of faith. That is a very liberating awareness because it means you need not be, *cannot* be, fitted into any secular school of thought. A Christian in the lineage of classical orthodoxy is defined by a cluster of sensibilities, loyalties and convictions (a worldview, if you will) that is drawn from and toward the Christ, in whom the meaning of all things is manifest. Therefore a Christian can never be more than a kissing cousin to any intellectual establishment that is not premised upon this fact of life and life eternal. (March 1979)

Defining human community

"Here he goes again." Among the most frequent criticisms this *Letter* receives is that too much attention is paid the abortion debate. As one friendly correspondent put it recently, "Everyone knows where you stand by now, so why not just let the subject rest for a while?" Why not? For the same reason that in years past and still today one could not be quiet about racial discrimination in Church and society. For the same reason one could not be silent about the shameful indifference of the Church to ministry among the poor, in the inner city and elsewhere. For the same reason that, during the Vietnam years and since, one could not desist from pressing the moral issues posed by America's foreign policy. In each of these instances the problem is not that people argued opposing viewpoints but that they did not want troubling (or, as the bureaucrats say, "divisive") questions raised. I am persuaded that the issues involved in the abortion debate engage the most urgent moral questions facing our society today. The core question is, to put it quite simply, How do we define the human community for which we accept collective responsibility? (Jan., 1980)

Apologia

In the root meaning of the term, I suspect I'm a good deal more radical now than I've ever been. . . . I am much more radical, but current radicalisms offer no believable home. The earlier ones didn't either. I've always been plagued or blessed by outofstepness (the Germans would have a word for it). It's not because I've wanted to be difficult or different. Well, maybe sometimes. But I've earnestly sought a sustaining community of discourse. I've never found it for long, least of all in communities that define themselves along the lines of political slogans and thought-slots. . . .

As to the most divisive issue, in 1967 I first published my continuing contention that the pro-abortion cause is inherently conservative; liberalism's goal is that the definition of the human community for which we are responsible be expanded, not narrowed . . . . For the last 10 years and more, then, I've known what it means to be attacked, sometimes viciously, by liberals who disagree. Not attacked as consistently as I have been from the right, to be sure, but the liberal attacks hurt more because they are from within my community of discourse. One lives with it, knowing that we have no abiding party. . . .

So "what happened to Dick Neuhaus" has been happening for a long time. I do not suggest that I have not changed. God forbid. Newman wrote, "Growth is the only evidence of life," and I hope I've grown. . . . (Nov., 1981)

We should not tell lies

In the religious communities the most strident proponent of abortion on demand is the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. In recent months RCAR has taken full-page advertisements in national newspapers declaring, "We believe abortion is an individual decision. And therefore your God-given right." . . . Among the ad's sponsors is the Upper New York Synod of the LCA. . . . A group of LCA clergy and lay leaders gathered around Gettysburg seminary have indicated their alarm at this interpretation of the LCA position. There are other expressions of deep concern within the LCA. In October, Bp. Herbert Chilstrom of the Minnesota Synod circulated to his clergy a moving, indeed anguished, letter about widespread indifference to the sanctity of human life. Such expressions should be welcomed. Because they can contribute toward a more humane society which cares for all human life—life which is surely God-given and for which

we are surely accountable. And they should be welcomed because they advance candor and clarity within our Lutheran family. Minimally, we should not tell lies to one another. The way things are, it is to be feared that the Church, far from being a zone of truth in a world of mendacity, is contributing to the mendacity. (Jan., 1982)

Space for discretion

Some issues do not lend themselves to formal rule-making. As we noted in *Freedom for Ministry*, homosexual activists "insist that formal statements and policies should be moved farther along the spectrum of attitudes toward homosexual practice: It is not a perversion to be condemned or a deviance to be tolerated or an exception to be acknowledged but an alternative to be approved." As the same book also emphasizes, the call to Ministry is a call to "adorn the Gospel" by an exemplary life which invites the emulation of the faithful . . . . As it is today, some synod and seminary examining committees are reported to ask more earnest questions about sexual orientation than about theological competence. In a community of saints and sinners—where we are all and always both—ambiguity is sometimes an essential part of love. There is no ethical nor theological warrant to compromise the Church's traditional teaching on sex, marriage and family. At the same time, there should be no compromise of pastoral and episcopal space for discretion and forgiveness with respect to the homosexual or heterosexual. The ancient distinction between private sin and public scandal still has much to recommend it, but always within the context of a call to holiness. The ALC is right; there is no need for a debate that would be unedifying and divisive, followed by a decision that would satisfy almost no one. In debate about sexuality, as in sexuality itself, it is well to remember that Freud did not intend sublimation to be a dirty word. (April, 1983)

The nefarious Alt

Consider the nefarious work of the collective person called "Alt" with the hymns in LBW. Wherever an otherwise poetic lyric suddenly descends into banality, look to the bottom of the page and you'll usually find that Alt has been at it again. Check out the original words and they are almost always superior. The work of Alt is condescending in the attempt to "simplify" for our presumably simple-minded lay folk expressions that might otherwise give occasion for thought. It is presumptuous, especially when it is trying to "improve" on classic texts. It is probably unethical to change other people's texts without indicating what Charles Wesley, Martin Franzmann, or whoever, actually did or did not write. (Perhaps an apparatus for textual criticism is needed at the bottom of the page.) Whatever else it may be, it is just plain tacky to flatten the tradition to fit current sensibilities, especially when sensibilities are as dulled as old Alt's. We have a number of wishes for the next book of worship, as there will certainly be a next one. High on our list is that Alt keep his/her unpoetic hands off the hymn texts. (Oct., 1985)

Political correctness

It was bound to happen. And now that it has, it should be nipped in the bud. Here is a Lutheran publication following the trendy line that we should stop speaking about the "disabled" and speak instead about the "differently abled." We understand the sincere and caring intention behind the suggestion, but no thanks. A 30-year-old man of our acquaintance who has the mind of a seven-year-old child is not differently abled, he is grievously disabled. A paraplegic woman of our acquaintance is not differently abled, she is grievously disabled. What has happened to such people is a great sadness and unspeakable evil. In the face of such wretchedness, people are frequently able, by the grace of God, to compensate heroically for their handicap. In many cases, the result is a life much richer than that lived by those who are normally endowed. To belittle the handicap is to belittle the grace and heroism by which it is conquered. In the churches today we are afflicted by well-intentioned sentimentalisms. We have a multitude of euphemisms by which we disguise sin and evil and thereby obscure forgiveness and conquering grace. Unbelievers have to be evasive about sin and evil because they do not know Christ. It ought not be that way with us. (Jan., 1986)

What's so funny?

The people of Milwaukee don't appreciate one bit the snickers rippling through American Lutheranism [in response to an early—and subse-

quently reversed—decision to locate the new ELCA headquarters in Milwaukee]. So what if it isn't a world class city? It does rank 18th in the U. S. (It was 12th in 1970, but that's only because a lot of people have been leaving.) And, when you consider that the metropolitan area includes Ozaukee and Waukesha counties, you get a sense of the size of the place. It's number one in Wisconsin, as they say up there. Talking about things like that helps get you through the short winter days. For the nights you're on your own. Some people listen to the radio on Saturday night, but most folks in Milwaukee don't know what's supposed to be so funny about life in Lake Wobegon.

Please understand that we have subscribers in Milwaukee, and one of them writes to say that city slickers can sneer all they want, but it's obvious Lutheranism never was intended to be a cosmopolitan faith. . . . Small is beautiful, as some very progressive people used to say. By that measure, Lutheranism has been becoming more beautiful year by year, and the "new church" promises to be more beautiful still. The release from Lutheran Council says Milwaukee is "known for beer, brats and a hearty Lutheran population," and was chosen by CNLC because "it had the advantage of being neither Chicago nor Minneapolis." Nor New York, Philadelphia nor just about anywhere else. There's no getting away from the fact that Milwaukee is Milwaukee. . . . Of course we will not be able to boast that we are "The Church that made Milwaukee famous." But we are the church that assured Milwaukee that it is not entirely forgotten. (April, 1986)

What if the merger fails?

The time has come to talk about it. What happens if the merger doesn't go through? If it is voted down at upcoming regional and national conventions, or if it is indefinitely delayed, one of the first things that will happen is that people will ask why. . . . This commentary is a "what if" exercise.

Reason #1: In terms of Lutheran unity, the proposal was crippled from the start. Because of the events of the '60's it did not include Missouri and therefore never was the "vision of Lutheran unity" proposed by the late Franklin Clark Fry. . . .

Reason #3: Lutherans, at least relative to most Christian groups, are serious about theology and confessional identity. When the word got out that the CNLC was thinking of writing "new confessions" for the church, alarm signals were triggered throughout the constituency. That reckless idea was turned back, but the uneasiness did not subside. . . .

Reason #13: This is a delicate one—the role of the AELC in the entire merger idea. The tiny AELC, an association of veterans who had been defeated in Missouri's wars, consisted of a pension plan, a portable seminary and superfluity of minibishops. In search of an achievement that would give meaning to its defeat, the AELC precipitated the idea of merger. The LCA initially seized on the idea in the hope that the AELC would be an ally in bringing the ALC into its more evangelical catholic understanding of Lutheranism. The disappointment was severe when in CNLC the AELC failed to transcend the 1960s "free to be" mentality that had dominated its failed insurgency in Missouri . . . .

The lesson to be drawn is not that merger was a bad idea. Perhaps it was a good idea at the wrong time. . . . The above, then, is one way the story might be told a few years from now. (April, 1986)

The future of Lutheranism

If the Lutheran Church has a future, it will be as the Lutheran Church. It will not be as imitation Baptists, Presbyterians, or anything else. If people are to become, remain, and rejoice in being Lutheran, it is because they understand the distinctively Lutheran way of being Christian. Being Lutheran is an evangelical catholic and catholic evangelical way of being in unity with the entire Church of Christ. The present state of American Lutheranism is not just "not satisfactory." It is a sickness unto death. The alternative is not beating the drums to revive flagging spirits, nor is it to move evangelism a few notches up on the bureaucratic agenda. The alternative is renewal—theological, pastoral, sacramental, catechetical. The alternative is to be something that others might have some reason to join. Church renewal is very difficult and, were it only up to us, impossible. Church renewal points us in directions almost exactly opposite to the directions pointed by the merger process, by Missouri's fascination with "church growth," and, we are sorry to say, by Bp. Preus' boosterism. There is no guarantee that a Lutheran Church that is excitingly and distinctively Lutheran would reverse the dismal mem-

bership figures, although there is good reason to believe that it might. But at least there would be more purpose and integrity in going down with the ship. (Dec., 1986)

Silencing the opposition

[In response to a bitter satire of *Forum Letter* written by Barbara Lundblad] Barbara Lundblad's response is typical of the irritation many feel with the way *Forum Letter* (*FL*) defines issues, brings them to light, and subjects them to critical examination. As one friend put it, *FL* is the closest thing we have to a free press in all of American Lutheranism. Because a free press is sometimes abrasive, it is not surprising that many have wanted to suppress *FL*.…

What must be understood is that *FL* is in the opposition. The dynamics and structure of the new church make clear that the party to which Lundblad belongs is the new establishment. Establishments typically try to silence the opposition. (Nov., 1987)

Practicing "my theology"

It is doubtful if theology is treated as seriously as baseball today, at least by many who are presumably trained to "do theology." Seminary teachers concoct, and students select from, a mishmash of courses that are, as one catalogue puts it, "responsive to the student's felt needs." Some schools require hardly a cursory acquaintance with the Lutheran confessions to which, at ordination, students will take a solemn oath—promising to conform their teaching, ministry, and lives to positions of which they know next to nothing. That is very "creative" indeed. Seminarians and pastors frequently speak of "my theology," based on what they find "personally meaningful." One might as well go for spiritual direction to Shirley Maclaine. At least she does not misrepresent herself as teaching according to an authoritative tradition. (May, 1990)

A parting word

This writer was ordained 30 years ago last month. The evangelical catholic understanding of Lutheranism seemed, at times, to be gaining ground over those years. That understanding had forerunners in figures such as Wilhelm Loehe . . . and Charles Porterfield Krauth. . . . Many of us were introduced to it by teachers such as Arthur Carl Piepkorn, and encouraged in it by the Second Vatican Council and the extraordinary advances of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues. Yet evangelical catholics have always been a minority in Lutheranism. The merger process resulting in the ELCA has shifted dramatically the dominant influence to the side of the religion managers, the ideological activists, and the confessional pietists of denominationalism. The first years of the "new church" suggest that the shift may be irreversible. In view of the regnant sociological, institutional, and even theological dynamics, the evangelical catholic position becomes increasingly hard to advance within the ELCA. So, as we said, [the "Call to Faithfulness" conference at St. Olaf College in 1990] was both heartening and sobering. It powerfully clarified the arguments and interests that are contending for the future of Lutheranism. (July, 1990, RJN's final issue of *FL*).

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