

FORUM LETTER

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Deity capable of compassion

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Good Friday, April 4 [1980]: Most human events yield to the erosion of time, and if they survive in memory at all, it is only in the form of dim, distorted myths. The greatest, most amazing, exception to this generalization was what occurred nearly two thousand years ago, on something resembling this same day of the lunar calendar, on the hill of Golgotha. Almost certainly, one must suppose, a man, a Jew, some sort of a dissident religious prophet, was crucified in company with two common thieves. . . . What was new and of stupendous power in the teachings of this man were two things: first, the principle of charity of love, selflessness, identification with the plight and struggle of the other; but secondly, the possibility of redemption in the face of self-knowledge and penitence—the possibility of reconciliation with one’s own ingrained and never wholly eradicable imperfections, with one’s animalistic nature and impulses, with man’s “original sin.” In the combination of these two things: charity and redemption, evoking as they did for the first time the image of Deity capable of compassion, there lay the origins of the majestic symbolic power of the life and death of the Savior, the power that inspired an entire vast civilization, created a great art, erected a hundred thousand magnificent churches, hung as emblem in token of solace and hope around a host of necks, shaped and disciplined the minds and the values of many generations—placed, in short, its creative stamp on one of the greatest of all flowerings of the human spirit. For the first time man, perched so uncomfortably and on his precarious mountain ledge, somewhere between his animalistic emotional-physical nature on the one hand and his unattainable dreams of beauty and of nobility of spirit on the other, found a source of strength in his struggle against the beast within that threatened to drag him into the abyss, and of solace for his inability to reach the spiritual summit of which he was capable of dreaming.

—George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2014), 525.

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Editor: Pr. Richard O. Johnson
<roj@nccn.net>

Associate Editor: Pr. Peter Speckhard
<pspeckhard@hotmail.com>

Member: Associated Church Press.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: P. O. Box 235, Grass Valley, CA 95945. <roj@nccn.net>

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327 <dkralpb@aol.com> Telephone 607-746-7511. Postage paid at Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

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Liturgical chaos



Since my retirement, I’ve been asked to do “pulpit supply” a few times—fewer, actually, than I would have imagined, but that’s really just fine with me. I’m willing to help out; the problem is that one just doesn’t know what one is getting into. At least in my corner of the world, liturgical chaos is everywhere, and I’d rather not pretend it’s OK with me.

Some of this I can blame on *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. At the time I retired, my congregation still had *Lutheran Book of Worship* in the pews. We, however, had been printing out the full liturgy each week, so we had the luxury of drawing from the *ELW* if that seemed appropriate, or sticking with the *LBW* if

that was more salutary. The point is, I've never had to conduct a complete liturgy using the *ELW* texts, for which I thank God.

But even if a congregation is using *ELW* (and most of them around here seem to be doing so; even my old congregation bought the thing about ten minutes after I left), I continue to be baffled at how people play fast and loose with the liturgy.

"Great recipe!"

Let me admit up front that I love the liturgy. The liturgy is really at the heart of why I became a Lutheran after growing up in the Methodist church. It is one of the gifts that I have always thought Lutheranism had to offer to the rest of American Protestantism. And so I cannot quite fathom why pastors and congregations have decided that they can pretty much junk it, while still loudly claiming that they are being faithful to it.

It reminds me just a bit of an online recipe site to which I subscribe. People post recipes, and then there are reviews. Very often the comments are along the lines of "This was a really great recipe, and I changed it by . . ." and then the reviewer lists all the substitutions, omissions, additions that he or she made, effectively rendering it an entirely different recipe; but still, the original one was "really great," except I never actually made it.

So last week I was engaged to lead the services at a congregation which has been without a pastor for a couple of months. It is, or at least once was, a very healthy congregation, vibrant, located in a university town, so one would think a congregation with some sophistication. Admittedly when a congregation is without a pastor, some things may slide a bit, particularly in worship, but I don't think that was the case here. I think they were pretty much on "autopilot," following the practices of the previous pastoral leadership.

Traditional and contemporary

They had two services, I was told, one traditional and one contemporary. That's a red flag for me right from the start, but I figured that as long as one was "traditional" (whatever that means), I could handle one that was "contemporary" (whatever that means). The person responsible for planning the service was in touch with me weeks ahead, so that's a good sign.

Her first question was which of the first two lessons I wanted to include. The congregation, it seems, typically only reads one lesson and then the Gospel. They do include the Psalm, usually; if they omit the Psalm, then they might read the other lesson, depending on what else is going on in church that day.

Well, we wouldn't want to spend too much time with the Bible now, would we?

Lent? What's Lent?

There was a *Kyrie* sung. No *Gloria*, but then it was the first Sunday of Lent, so that's kosher enough. There was no order for confession, either at the beginning or elsewhere in the service. Did I mention that it was the first Sunday of Lent? Wouldn't you think that confession might be important to include, at least during Lent?

Things stumbled along then, pretty much in order (except for the omitted lesson). Then we got to the Eucharist, which in their order begins with what they call "The Great Thanksgiving," but moves directly from the Sanctus to the Words of Institution. It's always puzzled me how a printed liturgy can claim to include "The Great Thanksgiving" without a Eucharistic prayer. Here I was grateful that this congregation *doesn't* print out the liturgy, so where they had indicated the Words of Institution, I just verbally announced a different page and directed them to a Eucharistic prayer. Nobody died from it.

Aging baby boomers

The real challenge, as you might imagine, was the "contemporary" service. Let me be clear first that I'm not opposed to the genre of music that goes by the name of "praise songs." Not my cup of tea, but clearly *adiaphora*. I do think that music, whatever it is, ought to be chosen in the service of the liturgy, and not just because it's peppy and catchy. It ought to reflect the theme of the season and the Sunday. That's true of traditional hymnody too, of course. What really rankles me is when a bunch of songs are just thrown into the service at any old place, with no apparent connection either to the theme of the day or to the integrity of the liturgy.

This congregation where I was supplying managed to do that reasonably well. The songs were at least loosely connected to the Scripture lessons for the day, and reasonably well performed by the

“praise band” (which was made up mostly of musicians in my general age range, another bit of evidence for my contention that “contemporary services” are mostly driven by the desires of aging baby boomers). I thought they were perhaps a little frisky for Lent, but then that’s kind of the point of praise songs, isn’t it?

Improper non-preface

There was, of course, no opening liturgy, two lessons only (and no Psalm), no Creed. I will say that this service did have a prayer of confession of sorts; I think it most likely was taken from Augsburg Fortress’s *sundaysandseasons.com*, so it had the usual political baggage (“We have sought security in possessions and the place of power in relationships”).

When we got to the Eucharist, however, it was even worse than the “traditional” service. Here we got only the *Sursum Corda* and the Words of Institution — not even a Proper Preface! Alas, this was all printed in the bulletin; I couldn’t easily change it.

I’ve had the experience when I’ve supplied (or even just worshiped) elsewhere of finding things all scrambled up. At one place, the sharing of the peace had been relocated to some place so unusual that I can’t even remember where it was. At others, parts of the liturgy have been jumbled around in one way or another in a totally idiosyncratic way. At least at this congregation what parts of the liturgy were there came in the expected order.

At the moment I’m only reflecting on the liturgy itself, but as an aside, there were other aspects of this recent experience that offended me — disposable plastic communion cups, the clear announcement that “all are welcome” (baptized or not) to receive communion. Those are topics for another day. My real question at the moment is, “Why can’t people just take the liturgy as it is?”

What can we trash?

I encountered this in my last several months in the parish, as I dealt with a self-appointed group that had decided we needed a “contemporary service.” I remember one meeting where the gang leader proposed that the topic for discussion be “What parts of the liturgy can we eliminate?” I suggested that this was really probably not the most fruitful way to approach things, but I was outvoted, and the group took the bulletin from the previous Sunday

and walked through each part of the liturgy, each person expressing an opinion about how important each item was. It wasn’t very helpful, though it did point out (if they were paying attention) that different parts of the liturgy are important to different people. Some in the group wouldn’t dream of omitting the confession, for instance, while others just didn’t think it was that important, and besides, it wasn’t uplifting.

Somebody had told the gang leader about “shall” and “may” rubrics. Of course a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing. He was convinced that “may” rubrics simply mean you don’t have to do it. He couldn’t quite comprehend my response that really, Lutherans don’t *have* to do anything, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t. I tried to explain that often a “may” rubric really means that this portion of the liturgy might be omitted for a weekday service, for instance; it doesn’t mean that it’s just optional any and every time you worship. They didn’t get that, either.

And in the end, the “liturgy” they devised pretty much ignored the rubrics anyway. They just included what they liked and trashed what they didn’t, no matter what the book said about “may” or “shall.” It’s about what you might expect from a liturgy by committee, especially when the committee has no education or understanding of liturgy, and of Lutheran liturgy in particular.

The tyranny of time

It seems to me that there are at least three things behind this compulsion to deconstruct the liturgy. The first is the tyranny of time. People just don’t believe they should be compelled to sit in church for longer than an hour. At this contemporary service on Lent 1, the praise band leader approached me before church, wanting to know if there was going to be a children’s sermon. They usually had one, but the supply pastor last week didn’t do one, and she just wanted to know my intentions so she could stretch or contract the praise music accordingly.

A generation ago, the time question often lurked behind the discussion of weekly Eucharist. Maybe people wouldn’t come right out and say so, but one concern was that weekly Eucharist would make the service “too long.” When many congregations moved to weekly Eucharist, there was a subtle (or not so subtle) pressure to eliminate other things,

so the service wouldn't last more than an hour.

Whether that's because there's too much pressure on the Sunday morning schedule in a given congregation, or because the people want to beat the Presbyterians to the restaurant for Sunday brunch, it's a stupid reason. The liturgy takes as long as it takes. It is the one chance we have during the week to step *out of time*, to rest in eternity.

I did it my way

The second issue is the pervasive American insistence on "doing it my way." This goes along with so much of the trend in American Lutheranism for every pastor, every congregation, to be an island unto themselves. A recent discussion on the Facebook group for ELCA clergy concerned use of the lectionary. It was quite astonishing how many chimed in to say that they pretty much ignore the lectionary in their preaching, and they're proud of it.

This is *adiaphora* run amok. The concept of *adiaphora* is a great thing, when understood in the right way. Lutherans have great evangelical freedom about many things, including worship. But when one exercises that freedom in a way that severs oneself from the "ties that bind" us together as a confessional community, why bother even calling oneself "Lutheran"? There are plenty of churches out there that don't have a liturgy, that expect every congregation and every pastor to do their own thing on Sunday morning. Wouldn't it be more honest, if you don't like the Lutheran liturgy, to go elsewhere?

Happy-clappy

The third issue is the widespread aversion to discomfort and challenge. How many times have I heard it: "I come to church to be uplifted, and I don't need to . . ." (fill in the blank: confess my sins, recite meaningless dogma, think).

But the liturgy is actually the antidote to discomfort, not its cause. Sometimes I come to church

feeling great on the surface, rather smug about my life. The liturgy reminds me that I'm in bondage to sin — a downer, yes, but it's realistic and true. Sometimes I come to church filled with anger or despair or discouragement, and I don't want to praise God. The liturgy pulls me along with everyone else's praises, and helps me to lift my eyes from myself and my problems. The liturgy addresses the fullness of human experience, each week, every week — but only if the liturgy itself is there in its fullness. If all that's there is happy-clappy enthusiasm — well, one can find that better at a concert or sports bar.

Permanence and uniformity

I personally think that every pastor and worship committee should regularly read C. S. Lewis's comments on liturgy in one of his *Letters to Malcolm*. He cites a man who said "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats." He then goes on to say: "Thus my whole liturgical position really boils down to an entreaty for permanence and uniformity. I can make do with almost any kind of service whatever, if only it will stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship." He's a little more generous than I with his "almost any kind of service whatever" — though I imagine his universe of possibilities was considerably smaller than is the case today.

But permanence and uniformity, those are the key words. The liturgy is not the personal property of individual pastors or congregations, but it belongs to the church. Nobody can stop a congregation or pastor from slicing and dicing it in whatever way they might want, but when they do that, it's no longer the church's liturgy. It is a sectarian aberration, and that's not what Lutherans really should be about.

— by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Clothed in righteousness

by Frank C. Senn



I once received this email from a Lutheran pastor, who wrote: "In my present call I have inherited a 'contemporary' service. In the negotiations that are always

necessary in these scenarios, I insisted on vestments (alb and stole) for eucharistic celebrations. A member expressed concern over the 'pomp' behind such vestments. My response revolved around the

themes of historicity, sacramental reverence, and the value in vestments as a 'covering' of the individual and a way to point toward the meal. However, my response feels inadequate somehow. How would you answer the question, what is the purpose and point of liturgical vestments for Lutherans?"

I told my fellow pastor that he gave a good answer. Vestments relate the Church of today to its origins. Vestments worn by leaders in world religions are almost always the clothing worn at the time of the founding, whether those leaders are Tibetan Buddhist monks or Iranian imams or Christian ministers.

Not casual dining

When I stand before the congregation on Sundays in alb, stole, and chasuble, I look like a Roman gentleman from the early centuries of Christianity. The Eucharist is not casual dining (even if some of our modes of distribution look like fast food!). It is served by those who are attired to reverently handle holy things. Assisting as well as presiding ministers should be vested because vestments cover the person (and personality) of the minister in order to emphasize the office of the ministry. In fact, vestments promote both uniformity and distinctions: uniformity in office, distinctions among the offices. So the pastor is distinguished from assisting ministers or acolytes by wearing additional vestments, such as stole and chasuble.

One might tell those concerned about "pomp" that God himself approves of vestments. After all, it was the Lord God of Israel who fashioned the vestments of the high priest for his tabernacle and temple. Read the description of the priestly vestments in all their intricate detail in Exodus 28. Consider all the layers on the high priest and remember that this is God's own instruction for his cult which is detailed in chapters 25-31. This divine instruction (*torah*) is given at the same time as the Ten Commandments. There's no division here between worship and ethics! One must appear before the Holy God in a state of righteousness, which had inseparable moral and ritual requirements.

Talk about pomp!

Then what? Moses comes down from the mountain and finds the people worshiping the golden calf. Talk about pomp! There was plenty of pomp

in the dancing around the golden calf. The historic renunciations at baptism were of the devil and all his works and all his pomps. Away with the devil's pomp; the Lord wants his own pomp – and deserves it. "Worship" means "ascribing worth." "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power" (Revelation 4:11). "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

The church member concerned about "pomp" probably thinks that vestments are incompatible with "contemporary worship." Has he or she ever attended a real rock concert? Has he or she ever seen all the pomp on the stage as the band plays, sporting colorful costumes, while lights blink and spotlights shine and fireworks go off and smoke rises thicker than incense? What's a simple alb, the baptismal robe of righteousness, compared with all that!? So-called "contemporary worship" (which usually has to do mostly with music) is still the liturgy of the church, unless the word and the sacraments are suppressed in favor of a concert with a "message" (which is sometimes the case).

Put on Christ

Even so, we must bring to the consideration of vestments a critical perspective. I cannot here trace in detail the whole ecclesiastical history and, yes, the political history of clergy vestments. But I would briefly note that at various times in Christian history vestments were provided or prohibited by political authorities. Constantine and subsequent Roman emperors gave to the bishops the insignia of the court to show their new status in Roman society (the origin of the stole and other items that have since passed out of usage). The alb was the basic tunic, and those who were baptized were clothed in a new white tunic when they came up naked from the font, signifying that they had "put on Christ."

The chasuble in its Eastern and Western styles was simply the top coat of a Roman gentleman, and patrons provided the bishops, presbyters, and deacons with robes (dalmatics from Dalmatia for the deacons) befitting their public function. These were kept in a sacristy closet as "Sunday best" to be worn in the liturgy rather than on the street. During the Middle Ages there was a tug-of-war between popes and kings over who would present the

pallium to an archbishop. At the time of the Reformation, the English Prayer Book, authorized by Parliament, prohibited chasubles, which were associated with the sacrifice of the Mass, but allowed copes, since Anglicans loved processions. The Puritans would have no “popish rags,” not even a comely surplice, and these were abolished in the Commonwealth.

Enlightenment

During the Age of Enlightenment vestments passed out of use among all Protestants, except for the preaching gown—and even that was shed by many American Protestant ministers. So in the nineteenth century Romantic reaction there was an interest in recovering the lost vestments. The Gothic revival, which aimed to reclaim suitable attire for liturgical ministers who were performing restored rites in reconstructed late medieval church buildings, may have been successful because of the industrial revolution against which they were rebelling. The new vestments could be mass-produced by machine in sweat shops instead of being sewn by hand in cloisters.

Because shoddy materials not correctly displaying medieval folds were the result, purists like Canon Percy Dearmer established the Warham Guild out of a sense of ritual correctness and moral scruples. Such guilds returned to hand-making individual vestments, although at a higher price. However, let us remember that vestments are fundamentally garments, not costumes. They are garments to be worn for special events, and therefore “off the rack” will not do. I’m proud that all the vestments and paraments worn and used at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston were lovingly crafted by the hands of a member, and good material was used.

What is at stake

The vestments are sacred garments. They derive their sacrality from the nature of the events for which they are worn. Since these events—the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments—are not trivial, neither can the garments worn by the liturgical ministers be trivial. If they are shoddy, the vestments will amount to a visual statement to all who see them that the act in which they are used is less than it purports to be: the worship of the Creator of all things through his Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

What is at stake in liturgical worship is both sober in attitude and splendid in scope. The vestments worn for such worship must be equally sober and splendid. Sobriety means that they are not billboards advertising ecclesiastical programs or ideological causes. The vestments themselves are symbols. They don’t need to be decorated with more symbols. They also contribute to the splendor of the divine liturgy. For this reason they are made of good quality natural material like lamb’s wool or silk and may be decorated with orphrey bands of brocade or gold or with nothing. Vestments modeling simplicity and splendor simultaneously might make a statement about the whole life of faith. It should not be ostentatious, but it should be worthy.

The Rev. Dr. Frank C. Senn is one the foremost Lutheran liturgical scholars in North America, the author of many books, the Senior of the Society of the Holy Trinity, and he is recently retired after years as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston, IL. This article, which is reprinted with his permission, appeared originally in Let’s Talk: Living Theology in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod (19:1, Epiphany 2014).

Omnium gatherum



Not very (re-)assuring • Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary scheduled their annual Luther Lecture event on Ash Wednesday. That seems an odd choice, and apparently they realized that some might find it so. “Please be assured,” the publicity said, “that there will be a full Ash Wednesday worship service following the Lecture, at about 11 AM.” It seems to have missed their notice that most parish pastors are busy offering a full Ash Wednesday worship

service in their own parishes that day, often at midday. For that matter, why would any pastor want to attend an Ash Wednesday service other than in his or her own congregation? I suppose that going to one at the seminary is at least better than taking part in one of those “ashes to go” things.

People do pay attention • I attended the Ash Wednesday service at the Episcopal congregation where we’ve been worshipping. As I was walking

toward the church, I encountered a woman whose name I can't recall but I know she was a "once in a while" attendee at my former congregation, and apparently has the same status at the Episcopal congregation. She greeted me and then said, "I was going to go to Peace Lutheran tonight, but I really wanted communion." I let that pass, thinking to myself, "Well, OK, but I'm sure you would have gotten communion at Peace Lutheran." But a few days later I learned that in fact the Ash Wednesday service at Peace Lutheran hadn't included the Eucharist. Imposition of ashes, but no communion. Of course as the retired pastor I'm not allowed to have an opinion about that, but it struck me that the failure to offer the sacrament actually influenced the decision of a potential worshiper to go elsewhere.

And speaking of Ash Wednesday • I look in now and then on the Facebook page for ELCA Clergy, often to my regret. If the discussions there are indicative of the theological acumen of ELCA clergy, we are in serious trouble. Several days before Ash Wednesday, a post was made by Pr. Heidi Neumark (who, until the rise of Nadia Bolz-Weber, was perhaps the most ubiquitous of ELCA clergywomen): "For those preparing Ash Wednesday worship materials . . . can we please consider the impact of verse 7 in the psalm [*sic*]? I think it falls in the category of things that should not be read aloud unless we are going to reflect aloud on it." The verse in question, if you don't get it, is from Psalm 51: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." OK, I get the concern about how that might be heard as suggesting that "white" is the equivalent of pure and sinless and all other things good, and how that might have racial overtones. We were talking about this when I went to seminary back in the last millennium, so it really is nothing new. But there are so many other sensitivities we now need to accommodate! Pr. Kirsten Mebust responded that "'Purge' is another word that's not going to be heard the same way by everybody." She then goes on to speak of a young woman "who is desperately trying to avoid every trigger that could set her back into active bulimia. My guess is she's not going to hear it in the way you hear it. And what about the gay activist fighting the new law in Arizona?" Then Pr. Eugene Koene observed that the *ELW's* Psalter solves the

problem: "Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be purer than snow" — "thus you get rid of 'purge' and 'whiter' in one fell swoop." Or, he adds, the *LBW* (remember that?) has "wash me, and I shall be clean indeed" — though it keeps "purge" in the preceding phrase. (I would have thought most ELCA clergy would have been using either *ELW* or *LBW*, which makes me wonder why this issue came up in the first place.) But then Pr. John Petty noted that "'Pure' isn't a bit better. People who worry about 'purity' have caused a ton of trouble in the church, past and present." He probably doesn't have the sixth beatitude in mind here. But my very favorite comment was from Pr. Matthew March: "If you're so concerned, translate it as 'De-lint me and I will be blacker than my clergy shirt.'" I'm not so big on paraphrases as a general rule, but there's a paraphrase with some possibilities.

Bishop in the news • That was quite an article about Metro New York Synod Bishop Robert Rimbo in the *Wall Street Journal*. It was, to begin with, an illustration of how mystifying Lutherans, and Christians generally, are to reporters, with quite a good number of errors and misinterpretation (such as the statement that the synod has "66,000 worshipers in 200 New York-area churches"; apparently that's the number of baptized members, though it seems unlikely that all of them worship regularly or even occasionally). But clearly the reporter was impressed with Bishop Rimbo. Part of it may have been his "expansive office near Columbia University, complete with Hudson River views." Or perhaps it was the bishop's analysis of Pope Francis's action to make the papacy "more inclusive" (whatever that may mean). Or maybe he just likes the idea that Rimbo is "the only spiritual leader trying to rebuild his flock with giant crossword puzzles in the subway and interactive art projects involving dye-filled soap bubbles." That latter evangelical strategy is apparently the brainchild of a Pastor McKelahan, who told the reporter that "while not explicitly religious, soap bubbles carry a spiritual message in that they must burst 'if they are to leave a lasting impression' — referring to a passage in the Book of John." (You know that one, yes?) Or perhaps the reporter was simply carried away with the news that Bishop Rimbo will "officiate his first same-sex

wedding this June in Manhattan.” In any event, it’s nice to have such enthusiastic coverage of New York City Lutherans in the *Wall Street Journal*. I guess.

Pity the Girl Scouts • Last year there was a lot of uproar about the Boy Scouts of America and their attitude toward gays. This year it’s the Girl Scouts who are being controversial – criticized, it seems, from every direction. From the right comes an accusation that the Girl Scouts have been partnering with Planned Parenthood, and then trying to hide the association. From the left (I guess) comes a furious denunciation of the Girl Scouts’ recent partnership with the Mattel toy company, producer of Barbie dolls. I have a certain amount of sympathy for both these criticisms of the Girl Scouts, but my concerns are more mundane. I continue to be grateful that the annual cookie sales happen during Lent so I have a spiritual excuse not to buy any.

Get them however you can • I’ve just finished teaching Medieval and Reformation Church history at Fuller Seminary, and I always spend a good deal of time discussing the various doctrines of the Eucharist among different parties in the 16th century. My students, most of them, come from Reformed or Pentecostal backgrounds; I’ve had a stray Lutheran or two, even an occasional Roman Catholic, but none in this particular class. Most of them, truthfully, have never thought much about the Eucharist before this class (not atypical of seminarians anywhere, I imagine). I’m pleased to report that in a sort of straw poll at the end of the discussion, about a third of the class confessed that their own view of

the Eucharist aligned most closely to that of Luther (as opposed to Zwingli, Calvin, the Anabaptists, or the medieval Roman Catholics). It’s not quite confessional subscription, I know, but I do what I can.

Let’s Talk • The article by Dr. Frank Senn elsewhere in this issue first appeared, as it says, in the Epiphany edition of *Let’s Talk: Living Theology in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod*. I suppose we may have plugged *Let’s Talk* before, but the new design of their website gives occasion to do so again. It’s a very interesting publication indeed, and it shows that it is possible for ELCA pastors to produce some theologically substantial essays (we already knew that about LCMS pastors). There is no charge (though financial contributions are welcome), and the material is freely available for copying and distribution among congregations or groups of pastors or others. Check it out at www.mcsletstalk.org.

On the ground • We discussed at some length the concerns of many Thrivent members about some Thrivent money going to Planned Parenthood, and Thrivent’s subsequent decision to suspend any funding of both “pro-choice” and “pro-life” organizations (*FL* February 2014). Word on the ground is that this has become a major headache for Thrivent in many of its local chapters, as quite a few members who are active in Lutherans for Life and other pro-life groups are understandably upset – so much so that they aren’t at all interested in listening to their local Thrivent representative try to explain why they should still support Thrivent.

–roj

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