

FORUM LETTER

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What is truth?



The Christian understanding is that truth is found only in following, in a faithful, trusting following. It's a following in which we can't see where the next step is, where we really do say with Cardinal Newman, "O, lead, kindly light." We do not need to see the distant destination, we need to know only the company. We need to know only the One who travels with us, who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. And wherever the honest quest for truth is going to take you, it's going to take you to where I am." This is not a truth we need to fear. To know this truth is to be wondrously freed. The same Person said, of course, in John 8, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." That's very countercultural, isn't it? . . . In most of our discourse today, and certainly in most academic settings, talk about truth makes people very uneasy, and especially if the truth turns to religion and questions of moral truth. . . . To speak of moral truth is almost to throw open our jacket and expose the T-shirt that says, "Beware—fanatic!" . . . I tell you what I think about this postmodernist, deconstructionist, antifoundationalist (use what word you will) move; I don't think it's for long. I don't think it's for long because finally, the dogma that "there is no truth other than the dogma that there is no truth" is not very interesting. It's kind of dumb, really. —Richard John Neuhaus, "Is There Life after Truth?" in Dallas Willard, ed., *A Place for Truth: Leading Thinkers Explore Life's Hard Questions* (IVP Books, 2010), 25-26, 32

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The Neuhaus biography: worth the read



[Editor's note: Randy Boyagoda's *Richard John Neuhaus: A Life in the Public Square* was released a few months ago (Image, 2015, ISBN 978-0307953964). Both Forum Letter editors would like to offer their respective takes on it. Up first is Peter Speckhard, who, in addition to being the associate editor of FL, is the nephew of the late Fr. Neuhaus.]

There exists a popular, broad outline of Richard John Neuhaus that he moved from the political and cultural Left to the Right over the course of his public life. Of course Neuhaus himself would have rejected such an outline as hopelessly inaccurate. Virtually everyone who has ever been described as "switching sides," Neuhaus included, would say they never moved or really changed, at least in any sense touching core principles, but that the party, or the culture, or the movement abandoned them. In their own eyes, most people have said, "Here I stand," and then watched as the march of time provided them with new neighbors standing nearby. They didn't change, everybody else did.

The broad outline is generally inaccurate, but so is the common objec-

tion. Real life does not take place on a spectrum from Left to Right, so efforts to explain why someone who was once identified with the Left might eventually come to be identified with the Right are doomed to oversimplification whether they claim the subject moved or the subject stayed still while the background moved. Randy Boyagoda avoids such oversimplification in his new biography of Neuhaus in two ways. First, he prefaces the biography by juxtaposing two events from Neuhaus's life that illustrate how the man could not easily be pigeonholed by political descriptions. Second, he writes a biography focusing primarily on the simple story of the man's life, leaving the conclusions, political scorecards, and pigeonholing to the reader.

God bless America

The two opening vignettes are telling. In the first, Neuhaus is hosting an anti-war protest in the 1960s—clearly a thing of the cultural Left. But he does something unexpected to provide nuance to the situation. He insists that the gathered “congregation” sing “God Bless America,” which is about the last song many 1960s war protestors were inclined to sing. The idea behind insisting on that particular song was that he was opposed to the Vietnam War precisely because he loved and supported America. This nuance ultimately led to his later break with his 60s co-activists, whose subsequent causes made clear they had become the “blame America first” crowd and had an outlook Neuhaus did not so much cast aside as point out he had never held in the first place.

The second takes place at a “Road to Victory” political rally sponsored by the Christian Coalition, attempting to secure religious and “values” voters for the GOP in the 1994 midterm election—obviously a thing of the Right. But when it came his turn to speak, Neuhaus offered a cautionary speech about the dangers of equating a political platform or election with the will or action of God. When the crowd responded with thunderous applause, Neuhaus openly wondered to a friend whether they had listened to a word he had been saying. Again, he was there and he was seen to be on their side, but it was a lot more complicated than that.

Taking at face value

The preface justifies Boyagoda's approach to

the biography, which is basically to give a straightforward, chronological account of Neuhaus's life, using interviews with family and friends, excerpts from Neuhaus's own reflections, and for the most part taking them all at face value. Blessedly, this allows the reader to make the analysis as to whether or to what degree the template of a man moving from left to right fits Neuhaus's actual life and accomplishments.

There are a few exceptions in which Boyagoda does not take his sources at face value and does some investigating and comparing. For example, he shows that throughout his adult life Neuhaus carefully cultivated an overstated sense of his relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr.—not lying about it but speaking about it suggestively and deliberately leaving the impression that the two worked together far more closely than they actually did. My guess is that is a charge to which Neuhaus would gladly plead guilty, when all was said and done. At the time he thought it necessary because it was the sort of connection that opened the doors he intended to walk through in life, but in the end any self-aggrandizement—something Neuhaus by all accounts had a penchant for—would not be something he clung to.

Pulled into the story

As someone who was not born when most of the events described take place, I found the simple chronological approach very helpful. We've all heard bits and pieces—this book, that meeting, such-and-such an institution—but until this biography came along, there was no narrative by which to see how these things related to each other. Unlike most readers, I was already acquainted with much of the family history and anecdotes but not well acquainted with the public timeline of events that Neuhaus's contemporaries know all about.

By reading the narrative straight through, I found myself being pulled into the story as the events that happened before I can remember started to merge with events I could remember in a cohesive way. For that to happen, it is important that the biographer not be pushing an agenda, offering a slant, or otherwise politicizing the subject, and I think Boyagoda largely avoids those pitfalls. Some might complain that this absence of critique (for the most part) amounts to an abdication of an important part

of a biographer's work, but I don't think so. This is as close as a biography comes to simply telling the story of a man and what he did rather than a propaganda piece using a famous man to further the biographer's point of view.

Minor quibbles

There are some minor quibbles I have about the book. As a storyteller Boyagoda writes very engaging prose, but has a verbal tic about the construction "x-cum-y" (e.g. Protestant-cum-Catholic, or protestor-cum-apologist); this may serve his subject well but he uses it so often it becomes a distraction. Also, he presents some of the family stories in a misleading way or gets the details wrong – at least according to my mom, about whose stories I would only ever write glowing reviews.

For example, he seems to follow Neuhaus's own account of his baptism (which, importantly for the sacramental point he was making, Neuhaus himself did not remember) as having been a quick and simple affair at the kitchen sink, a detail that in some contexts was also important to a point Neuhaus might be making about baptism. But in reality, according to other family members who do remember being there, it was as formal a ceremony as could be arranged under the circumstances of the family being quarantined, and it took place in the living room rearranged for the purpose with a very nice bowl, not a sink, serving as the font. It doesn't really change much – it was Water and the Word either way – but it does make the reader wonder just how accurate this picture is in places. Of course an author painting a picture of something being described by many people remembering their long gone childhood might be hard-pressed to find sufficient agreement on the details to paint with precision, and Neuhaus, as we've seen, was not immune to the temptation to make his personal story fit the point he was making, so Boyagoda can easily be excused on this score.

Outsider's view

Boyagoda, a Canadian Catholic born in Sri Lanka, is not an insider to American Lutheranism, and it shows in some of his attempts to describe it. Even in his acknowledgments he lists Neuhaus family members, co-workers from *First Things*, and other mostly (but not exclusively) Catholic friends of

Neuhaus. It might have served the author well to spend more time with Neuhaus's Lutheran friends, if for no other reason than to get a better feel for that aspect of Neuhaus's experience.

But that being said, I think his outsider status to Lutheranism is a strength of the book. I've read too many accounts of late 20th century American Lutheran goings-on to think I could ever read a biography of Neuhaus written by a Lutheran insider that wasn't slanting the story to further the author's personal agenda or settle an old score. In this biography one does not have to wade through the author's take on Seminex, fellowship between the ALC and LCMS, the formation of the ELCA, etc., because the author doesn't have a personal take on those things and thus can't gum up the story of Neuhaus with it. This authorial distance keeps the book very readable for the widest possible range of Lutheran readers who are interested in the subject and want to read about him without getting dragged back into old but ongoing internecine battles.

"Tragic, just tragic"

Neuhaus died in January of 2009. My mother was among the people taking turns keeping vigil at his bedside amid the parade of people coming to see him for prayers and blessings. Though not all of it is included in the biography, some of the last audible words he spoke aloud in this world show he remained the man he always was until the end, a man with strong opinions, a big heart, and extremely resistant to categories. Trying to engage him and keep him mentally active, my mother mentioned that it would be a couple of weeks until President Obama would be sworn in. Neuhaus roused at that and was briefly alert, but only said, "Tragic. Just tragic," and then sank down in the bed. For a little while it seemed those might be his last words. But later an elderly, biracial couple came up to the room, a couple Neuhaus had married early in his years in Brooklyn and called every year on their anniversary. My mother said they could see him but shouldn't expect him to be able to respond. But when she spoke into his ear who was there to see him, he opened his eyes and smiled and said the woman's name. After that, for all practical purposes he was done talking, spending his last days responding to people, if at all, only with a slight nod or a squeeze of the hand.

So just as he began his public ministry with strong but category-defying ideas like singing “God Bless America” at an anti-Vietnam War protest, he ended it with more of the same as a long-time crusader for racial justice who was nevertheless openly disappointed by the election of the first African-American president, yet still the same loving pastor to both blacks and whites that he always was, all the way to the end.

The categories always seemed inadequate to the task with Neuhaus. The pieces of his outlook fell together coherently but in unpredictable or atypical ways. That’s what makes his life and his views so interesting and what makes it so sad even for those who disagreed with him that he finally stopped talking. It also makes Boyagoda’s plain biography of him well worth the read.

—by Peter Speckhard, associate editor

Worth it, yet disappointing



It certainly says something about the significance of Richard John Neuhaus that Randy Boyagoda’s new biography has been widely reviewed, and in all the right publications. The reviews have been positive (though it’s worth noting that Neuhaus probably wrote at least occasionally for every publication that has reviewed the book, and then some). Boyagoda “has explored and explained this fascinating American as well as anyone could have hoped,” said the *New York Times*. “A fine book . . . a page-turner,” declared *National Review*. “Winsomely written,” added the *Wall Street Journal*.

Short shrift to the Lutheran Neuhaus

And it is winsomely written. Boyagoda seems an unlikely author of a Neuhaus biography (which makes it all the more surprising the book has been so warmly received). A Canadian novelist, he is an associate professor of English at Toronto’s Ryerson University. He does tell a good story. Yet I came away from the book dissatisfied. My biggest disappointment is that Boyagoda gives short shrift to the Lutheran Neuhaus. He writes some about the formation involved in growing up as the son of a conservative Missouri Synod pastor, but he doesn’t seem to fully get the role that Neuhaus’s Lutheranism played in the larger narrative of his life. Probably that is something that wouldn’t be of much interest to the general public; most readers, after all, are more interested in Neuhaus’s later career as “public intellectual,” which was mostly in his Catholic period.

Still, Neuhaus spent most of his years as a Lutheran, and Boyagoda’s disinterest in—and may-

be ignorance of—those Lutheran decades leaves a pretty big hole in his attempt to understand the man. And that disinterest or ignorance provokes another concern. There is a consistent failure here even to understand the basics of 20th century Lutheran history. So, for example, he mentions a 1979 letter to Rudolph Ressemeyer, “who had been his LCMS Atlantic District superior and was now his ELCA East Coast Synod bishop.” That was, of course, nearly a decade before the ELCA came into existence; the East Coast Synod was related to the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. A few pages later he refers to the ELCA as “the church that broke away from Missouri in the aftermath of the Seminex crisis and had since merged with two other Lutheran churches.” Wrong again.

What else might be wrong?

In discussing other Lutheran associations, Boyagoda’s nomenclature is also inconsistent. Sometimes he has Neuhaus as editor of *Lutheran Forum*, sometimes *Lutheran Forum Letter*, sometimes *Forum Letter*. Well, lots of people get them confused. He refers to our publisher correctly in one place, then incorrectly as the “Lutheran Publicity Bureau” in another.

None of this is very important in the big scheme of things, and as Pr. Speckhard says, there is some advantage to “authorial distance.” But when an author consistently misunderstands or misstates matters that one knows something about, it naturally raises questions about how accurate that author is about other matters. Again, it suggests that he simply doesn’t understand the intricacies of 20th century American Lutheranism (well, who does?), but that

he didn't care enough about that aspect of Neuhaus's life to figure it out during the five years he worked on the biography. It leaves this historian wondering just what other parts of the story the author didn't understand or didn't interpret correctly.

The narrative Boyagoda particularly wants to tell is how Neuhaus journeyed from being something of a left-wing, anti-Vietnam War activist, to his later role as neocon or Catholic theocon. That's a narrative well worth considering, though in the end once again I found the book disappointing.

The big narrative

I admired Neuhaus. I did not know him; we corresponded once or twice (more accurately, he kindly acknowledged a letter or two I wrote to him), and I met him briefly once after his transition to the Roman Catholic Church. What fascinated me about him is that in many ways my own theological journey seemed to be at least a faint parallel of his. I'm still trying to understand mine, and I hoped that Boyagoda's biography would help me do that by explaining Neuhaus's. No such luck.

I first heard of Neuhaus back in those Vietnam days. I somehow came upon *Movement and Revolution*, the book he co-authored with Peter Berger. I was a college student at the time, full of angst about the war and especially the draft, committed to what we liked to call "the movement." I can't remember now much of what the book said (it has long since been purged from my library); I just remember that I liked it, and that I was drawn to this pastor who seemed to "get it."

Intrigued and influenced

So I was predisposed to take up with some sympathy other things that he wrote. *Freedom for Ministry* was given to me as a gift not long after I was ordained, and I found it fascinating and challenging. When I discovered *Forum Letter*, I read it avidly, and continued to be intrigued by, likely influenced by, Neuhaus's perspectives on the church and the culture. In my own transition from the United Methodist Church to Lutheranism, I found him an inspiring guide. (A word of confession here: I was a delegate to the ELCA constituting convention in 1987, and on the first ballot for presiding bishop, I voted for Richard John Neuhaus. If I'm recalling correctly, he got two votes; I have no idea who the

other was, but I do remember the murmur in the convention hall when his name was read.)

Boyagoda narrates the story of Neuhaus's anti-war days—his key role, for instance, in Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, though he is frustratingly brief in explaining Neuhaus's ultimate break with that group. He twice relates (once in his introductory chapter and again in chronological sequence) the story of Neuhaus insisting that the participants in an anti-war "Service of Conscience and Hope" sing "God Bless America." The author obviously sees significance in this anecdote, an indication perhaps that Neuhaus was "in but not of" the anti-war movement. I suspect he puts more weight on this than it should be asked to bear; I took part in more than my share of anti-war gatherings in that era, and singing "God Bless America" just doesn't surprise me. I can't remember any specific instance of a group doing so, but at least in my circles there was indeed a strong sense that our "leftish sentiments" were precisely patriotic, and expressing that in song would not have been out of character.

Change of course?

When did Neuhaus's apparent change of course take place? Pr. Speckhard makes an interesting point about the fallacy both of any individual's claim that "I didn't change, everyone else did," and of the usual objections to such a claim. Life is indeed complicated, and no one develops in a precisely straight and predictable direction. Some years ago I attended a high school reunion and had a conversation with a woman whom I remember as a very conservative Christian teenage girl. She had heard that I had become a pastor, and was flummoxed—even more so when she found some of my sermons on line and perceived that I was actually a *Christian*, even by her lights. She wanted to know when I had changed. I responded that I really hadn't changed all that much, and that she apparently just didn't know me all that well in high school.

Of course saying "I haven't changed" doesn't necessarily require one to add, "everyone else did." Still, we all change, and the question is really how does one understand and interpret those changes, whether in oneself or in another. Sometimes there are clear and definitive signposts. I have an indelible memory of being in the library at Yale Divinity School one January day in 1972 when a

classmate came in with great exuberance and asked me if I'd heard the good news. The good news turned out to be the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. I hadn't heard about it, as it turned out, so I just answered politely and noncommittally, but I remember quite clearly thinking, "That's just not right. Why would someone who claims to be a Christian think it is?"

So there, in 1972, was a signpost pointing to a trajectory of conviction that might have seemed unlikely at the moment, at least to my friends — a trajectory on which very few of my friends in 1972 would ultimately join me. Was that a moment of change? Maybe, maybe not. More like a moment of discovery: Ah, this is what I believe; I didn't see that clearly until now.

Seeing clearly

Boyagoda locates Neuhaus's "discovery time" in 1971, during and after a trip to Africa. The timing seems about right, though he doesn't really help the reader understand what provoked the discovery — or the change, if it was a change. Oddly enough, Boyagoda pretty much fast-forwards through the years from that Africa trip to the drafting of the Hartford Declaration in 1975 — a time that would seem to be crucial in understanding Neuhaus's developing thought. But those developments — and indeed, the whole direction of Neuhaus's thought — must be understood with a careful attention to his theological and spiritual journey, as well as his political journey.

It is precisely here where Boyagoda might have found some enlightenment in attending more closely to the Lutheran Neuhaus. Neuhaus was a contributor and then a regular columnist in *Lutheran Forum* virtually from its inception in 1967 until he took over *Forum Letter* in 1974; he then edited the latter publication until 1990. He was also the editor of *Una Sancta*, an independent Lutheran oriented magazine focused on liturgy and doctrine, from 1964 to 1970. That's a lot of years in which he was writing as a Lutheran pastor — giving evidence of his own theological development, as well as plenty of commentary about social and political matters. For the most part, however, Boyagoda seems not to have dipped very deeply into this voluminous material. He may have thought it unimportant to the larger story he was telling; the historian in me wonders

how one can get that large story without understanding this very important strain.

An interesting example: Boyagoda comments on an article Neuhaus contributed to *Christian Century* in 1972, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Radical" (issue of April 26, 1972); he even alludes to the article in the title of his chapter about this period: "The Lonely Radical Looks Elsewhere." But some months earlier, in November, 1972, Neuhaus published a piece by the same name, though it is a quite different article, in *Lutheran Forum*. In this column he acknowledged that "in this tenth year of his being called a 'radical young pastor' this radical young (?) pastor takes public inventory of the distinctions to be made" between himself and "some of my radical friends." He spells out in some detail his discontent with where he sees "the movement" going — matters that are mentioned briefly in the *Christian Century* article, but more pointedly in *Lutheran Forum*. There is also a lovely terminological irony in his protest of "the neo-conservatism that has invaded some radical circles under the banner of the ecology movement."

The radical agenda of the Kingdom

But more to the point, here Neuhaus writes as a Lutheran in a way that probably wouldn't have passed muster in the *Christian Century*. Insisting he is not "going conservative," he proposes "what I believe is the radical agenda for our times." "The radicalism of the Kingdom," he writes, "is like the man who puts his hand to the plow and does not look back. He has no illusions about the prospects for success: a little plough, a lot of dirt and a furrow with no end in sight. But one day the Lord of the vineyard will declare it done, will turn us around, and we, looking back, will see our labor crowned by a vineyard so fruitful that we will be embarrassed by the timidity of our wildest dreams. . . . Meanwhile, the company along the way is not so bad: saints, martyrs, angels and archangels, and a sizeable group of ordinary folk as confused and crazily hopeful as ourselves."

In Neuhaus's "Lutheran writing" through the 1970s and 1980s, I suspect one might find evidence of his thoughts (whether we understand them as "changing" or "growing" or something else) that would be at least as enlightening as his writings in his many other arenas. It would also be useful to

explore his work with *Una Sancta*, since it seems clear to me that Neuhaus's liturgical life and piety is an important component of his thought over the years — though one that was a peripheral concern in, say, his *First Things* editorials and comments or his columns and articles in *National Review* or *Christian Century*.

All that being said, Boyagoda's biography is

still worth reading. Its reception indicates that there is considerable interest in Neuhaus in the "public square." But I hope Boyagoda's will not be considered the final word on Richard John Neuhaus; there are too many aspects of his life and thought — and especially his life and thought as a Lutheran — that are left unexamined. They deserve to be considered.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Omnium gatherum



Doesn't work for me • Sig Siefkes, weighing in a bit late on the question of what to call "contemporary worship,"

writes: The primary purpose of language is to convey thought and ideas. Since everyone knows what a contemporary worship service is, it would seem that this question best be left alone. The term 'contemporary worship' has served this purpose quite well I think." I beg to differ. "Contemporary worship" can mean pretty much anything from a Marty Haugen liturgy to little discernible liturgy at all. (I know, I know, some of you think that's a distinction without a difference.) Actually my current congregation has a "contemporary service" which is pretty much straight *Book of Common Prayer* Rite 2, but with praise songs rather than hymns. The scope is really too broad to be described by "contemporary worship," in my opinion.

More about contemporary worship • Reader Dan Green thinks "informal worship" fits the bill when there's no discernible liturgy, but when the liturgy is retained, it's more like "folk/campfire musical worship service" — much "contemporary Christian music" being like the 60s and 70s folk music people used to sing at church camp. But he also thinks that "praise bands" have a tendency to "perform too much," putting the focus "on their playing and singing rather than on God." He also allows as how he kind of preferred it when organs and choirs were in the balcony. Incidentally, Mr. Green is the son of the late Dr. Lowell C. Green, who had a distinguished ministry in several parishes, then at Concordia College in River Forest and Concordia Theological Seminary in Ontario. Dr. Green died last summer at 88.

Affirming our "faith" • My comments about what may loosely be called "creeds" in contemporary Lu-

theran liturgies continue to bring new examples. One reader sends a bulletin from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Glenwood Springs, CO, along with a comment, "It's creeping east." Their liturgy includes, in the place where one might expect the creed, something that runs like this: "We believe that God is present in the darkness before dawn; in the waiting and uncertainty where fear and courage join hands, conflict and caring link arms, and the sun rises over barbed wire. We believe in a with-us God who sits down in our midst to share our humanity. We affirm a faith that takes us beyond the safe places: into action, into vulnerability and into the streets. We commit ourselves to work for change and put ourselves on the line; to bear responsibility, take risks, live powerfully, and face humiliation; to stand with those on the edge; to choose life and be used by the Spirit for God's new community of hope." The bulletin credits the *Iona Abbey Worship Book*. At least they have the integrity not to call this a "creed" but an "affirmation of faith." I guess there's something to be said for that. But what exactly is it affirming? Certainly nothing overtly Christian; the only rather vague allusion to Christ is the reference to "a with-us God," which, if one were really being charitable on steroids, one might hear as "Emmanuel." More likely it's a reference to the God "Withit" whom I mentioned in the January issue. This kind of affirmation does, however, avoid theological quarrels over words like *homoousios* or *filioque*. I guess there's something to be said for that, too. But not much.

More about cremation • Another reader, Robert Wenzel, is pretty steamed about Mark Granquist's comments about funerals (March *FL*). His adjectives run from "nutty" to "off-target" to "hurtful." Dr. Granquist's comments about funeral directors who say that cremation is sometimes chosen as a way to

“deny death and short-circuit the mourning and grief process” and that immediate cremation can actually disrupt the grieving process are “two of the dumbest statements I have ever read. . . . You are interviewing funeral directors, what do you expect them to say?” My guess is that quite a few pastors (Mr. Wenzel appears to be a layperson) would agree with these funeral directors, and that very few pastors would agree with Mr. Wenzel’s characterization of Dr. Granquist’s thoughtful remarks.

More than bunnies • Last time I expressed some astonishment at our local megachurch which was advertising its Easter Day theme as “Answering Your Difficult Questions.” So I was interested to see that by the time Holy Week rolled around, that topic seemed to have vanished from their Easter services advertisement in the local paper. Now it was to be “Raised to Life” – a definite improvement, though I’m a little suspicious of the subtitle, “When pain and confusion lead to joy.” Sounds a little psychobabblish to me. Actually it was fascinating to read the ads from the various churches in my community. And a bit discouraging. The local United Methodist Church invited the public to “Celebrate the beauty of New Beginnings . . .” A local independent (I guess) congregation promised “Radical Worship music, Drama Presentation, Flag & Dance Presentation.” If I’d been in town, I might have stopped in there just to see what the heck that was about, and then I could have stayed for the “Family Fun Day” at a local park, featuring “Bounce house, Family Feast, Water Baptisms, and Games.” The Southern Baptist congregation had a “Sunrise Service” at 7

a.m. (about an hour late, seems to me), but at the regular worship hours they were planning an “Easter Production” (apparently some kind of musical). Another congregation welcomed the public “to celebrate Easter with them in a family celebration of resurrection.” I’m a fan of families, but that sounds like a fairly weak Christology. I was kind of astonished that the Unity Church had an ad for Easter services, asking “Does spirituality appeal to you more than religion? Discover and live your Spiritual Purpose and Potential”; then they noted there would be a “Holy Thursday Service with Communion.” A “spiritual” communion service, do you think? Holy cow. I was also flabbergasted to see that nearly every church’s ad (Lutherans and Catholics excepted) promised an Easter egg hunt. That’s something I never did, but it seems to be a necessity around here (though I just can’t imagine an unchurched family thinking, “Wow, let’s go there! They have an Easter egg hunt!”). It helped me appreciate, at least to a degree, another local congregation’s ad: “Easter: So much more than bunnies.”

Giving Forum • One of our longtime loyal subscribers, Pr. William Hampton, died a few months ago. Bill probably held the record for the number of gift subscriptions to the *Forum* package that he provided over the years; I’m not sure of the number, but it could safely be described as “many.” He also provided enough money so that those gift subscriptions will be renewed for a while into the future. Most readers probably can’t match his generosity, but most readers could buy one gift subscription for somebody for one year. How about it? – roj

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