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The subterfuges of our deceit



There is hardly a man or woman in the world, who has not got some corner of self into which he or she fears to venture with a light. The reasons for this may be various, as various as the individual souls. Nevertheless, in spite of the variety of reasons, the fact is universal. For the most part we hardly know our own reasons. It is an instinct, one of the quick instincts of corrupt nature. We prophesy to ourselves that, if we penetrate into that corner of self, something will have to be done which either our laziness or our immortification would shrink from doing. If we enter that sanctuary, some charm of easy devotion or smooth living will be broken. We shall find ourselves face to face with something unpleasant, something which will perhaps constrain us to all the trouble and annoyance of a complete interior revolution, or else leave us very uncomfortable in conscience. We may perhaps be committed to something higher than our present way of life, and that is out of the question. Religion is yoke enough as it is. So we leave this corner of self curtained off, locked up like a room in a house with disagreeable associations attached to it, unvisited like a lumber closet where we are conscious that disorder and dirt are accumulating, which we have not just now the vigour to grapple with. But do we think that God cannot enter there, except by our unlocking the door, or see anything when He is there, unless we hold Him a light? . . . We know how God sees through and through us. We know how bare and odiously intelligible to Him are all the subterfuges of our deceit and misery. We know how His eye rests upon us incessantly, and takes us all in, and searches us out, and as it were burns us with His holy gaze. . . . O with what unutterable faith must we believe in our own falsehood, when we can feel it to be anything like a shelter in the presence of the all-seeing God! —Frederick William Faber, *Spiritual Conferences* (1859), 162f.

I was wrong: why I became Roman Catholic by Russell E. Saltzman



Richard Neuhaus, I discovered, wheedles as well dead as he ever did alive. I guess that is finally why I became Roman Catholic. I have ground his arguments with me to dust and, mote by mote, reconstructed every one of them. He wins.

Why I had resisted

In the fall of 2007 at my retirement dinner as editor of *Forum Letter*, Neuhaus was the featured speaker. By then he was sixteen years a Roman Catholic priest. For me it was a mixed night. I surely did enjoy seeing everyone and hear-

ing all the nice things said of me. (I'm so glad my wife was there to witness that.) But hanging over it, there was Neuhaus.

Think of this. A Lutheran publisher, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (ALPB), calls in a Roman Catholic priest, even if he had been the previous editor, to note the retirement of his still-Lutheran successor. Richard's remarks, best I remember, focused not on the work of the ALPB but on the broader state of the universal Church, situated best—he wasn't letting us guess about it—in the Church of Rome.

My responding remarks addressed, out of necessity I thought, why I had resisted going to Rome and why I was remaining a Lutheran, despite the stubborn influence Neuhaus still had on many of us. The dichotomy could not have been clearer.

The best Catholic a Lutheran can be

My response, which appeared on these pages [*FL* January 2008], was to explain once again (to Neuhaus if to no one else) why I was remaining a Lutheran. I finished with a florid declaration: "I must instead be the best Catholic a Lutheran can be, and there I rest content, trusting all else to the Lord."

The next night my wife and I had a private dinner with Neuhaus. I asked mischievously how he liked my speech. He didn't want to talk about it. So I pushed. He then restated each of the four points I had covered and smoothly, yet with a patient kindness, quickly refuted each.

Neuhaus's very presence at the dinner raised the question I had first asked in my second issue of *Forum Letter* way back in 1990 [*FL* September 1990]. Covering Richard's departure for Rome, I asked:

Does evangelical catholicism necessarily lead to Roman Catholicism, if Neuhaus is any example? I said no. I was wrong.

The fix I'm in

Lutheran evangelical Catholicism—if it is to be both evangelical and catholic—must be of the Church of Rome. There, firmly, I find the very things evangelical catholics most treasure: Gospel, creed, confession. That is the conviction I reached and of that, I cannot say more.

After Neuhaus became Roman Catholic, I extracted from him a promise he would write a reflection for *Forum Letter* a year later. Come a year, he backed out. There was nothing he could say, he explained, that would not sound triumphal or condescending or both.

That's the fix I'm in. If I were to say more, a lot of people would mistake it for "Ya'll better get over here if you want to save your sorry Lutheran soul." And it would be a mistake, for that is not what I am saying and is not how I regard my Lutheran years.

After one of our "frank discussions" one night, Neuhaus later sent me a book, inscribed "Companions together." That sums it up and that's where I'll stop: Lutherans, Catholics, every one of us whom Christ has found for his own. Nothing else needs saying.

The immediate past editor of Forum Letter, Russell E. Saltzman is a featured writer at First Things magazine web site and the book review editor for Aleteia.org, a Catholic news web site. He can be reached at < russell.e.saltzman@gmail.com >.

Rome to Wittenberg

by Raymond J. Brown



Those of us who read *Forum Letter* and *Lutheran Forum* cannot help but be aware of friends and colleagues who have "swum the Tiber" over the past generation. There is seldom any bitterness among those of us who remain Lutheran, but most certainly there is a sense of loss. Well, I am one who went the other way: from Rome to Wittenberg.

My journey, such as it was

This does NOT purport to be a definitive study, but more of what our evangelical brethren would call a testimony.

Admittedly, I have no pretense of theological education. But I was a Roman Catholic who in my late twenties became a Lutheran. It was three years before I met my wife, so no, it was not a con-

version for the sake of marriage. And I was not a lapsed churchman, looking for something similar but perhaps less demanding. Nor was I being encouraged by some spiritual mentor. The reasons were wholly theological. I came to believe that Lutheranism had it right on the Biblical essentials.

It was not a straight shot for me from Rome to Wittenberg. I had some diversions and blind alleys, but in the interest of brevity I will skip describing these. But as those of similar experience tend to identify one another, so have I discovered a number of folks who, as adults (lay and clergy), have seriously embraced the Church of the Augsburg Confession. I am not here speaking of those who are lapsed Romans looking for some reclamation, or who married a Lutheran, or who like a certain pastor or parish for reasons of fellowship or environment. Frankly – Lord forgive me – I tend to heartily disdain such purposes.

More Lutheran than cradle Lutherans

And I have indeed discovered one fascinating thing: at least in my own experience, those who become Lutherans as adults indeed do so for theological reasons. Indeed, most become more Lutheran in belief and commitment than those who started in the cradle.

Do these adult seekers and finders find frustrations within the Church of the Augsburg Confession? Oh, yes:

- They discover that few Lutherans have any clue about what the Augsburg Confession is.
- They observe that many Roman Catholics are actually Lutherans and many Lutherans are actually Methodists.
- They grieve the reality that, increasingly, one seldom knows what worship form to expect in a given parish.
- They lament the fact that the ELCA seems to be the Democratic Party at prayer (or maybe the Socialist Party), and the LCMS seems to be the Republican Party at prayer (or maybe the Tea Party).
- They suspect that the national church bureaucracies could operate without Christ for three years before they realized it.
- They wonder, even though “Word and Sacrament” are the Lutheran bywords, how sacramental Lutherans really are.

Okay, that all is admittedly too broad a broadside shot, but there is some truth in the broadside. My point is that serious people become Lutherans for reasons of theology. And serious Lutherans will have grave problems with what goes on within their communion.

Those who swim the Tiber

Why do some quite serious Lutherans in the evangelical catholic crowd go to Rome? Well, for sure they get tired of the intramural fights within Lutheranism. But I think the most profound and lasting reason is ecclesiology.

Lutherans are terrible with ecclesiology. Of course, the earth tremors starting in Wittenberg in 1517 were set off by Reformers who had no thoughts about ecclesiology other than to allow that bishops and councils may err, and had erred. But church polity was not a real concern because no new church or denomination had been intended. Thus within Lutheranism, then and today, one may discern every type of church organization and disorganization. The prefecture titles sometimes sound churchly and sometimes political, depend upon historical vagaries, and seldom accrue any lasting influence.

For many communions, authority and polity are paramount. Not so for Lutherans. For us it is an afterthought and, as Gritsch and Jenson wrote, they are our own radical responsibility in any given place and time. That outlook is one of the few things that would for a modern Episcopalian be actual heresy.

Authoritative disorder

To those attuned to things being done “decently and in good order,” the Lutheran genius for authoritative disorder can become troublesome. But among those who do depart for Rome – and I do not at all wish to offend – I sometimes perceive some self-deception. There is a tendency to state that one may actually be more faithful to the Confessions in Rome, or that since Vatican II the separation is no longer necessary. But this means, whatever explanations may be offered, that Article IV of the Augsburg Confession, the article on which “the Church stands or falls,” has been forsworn. I am not aware of any Catholic converts having so stated explicitly, and I sometimes wonder why. The Church of Rome does not adhere to Article IV and justification by

faith apart from the works of the law.

Here are some of my own admittedly subjective observations and surmises of those who took the opposite direction I did:

- The concept of *semper eadem* ["ever the same"] in a rapidly changing world is inviting.
- Those attracted to Rome are not without a romanticized longing for what has been described as "that strange divine sea."
- Some of their best friends are indeed Catholics.
- There is no obfuscation on abortion by church officialdom.
- There is less of "the next big thing" syndrome every few years.
- Those ordained and entering the Latin Rite are usually already married. And for most

clergy and laity, their reproductive concerns are in the past tense. Thus certain possible struggles of conscience are moot.

All quite sad

Again, none of this is intended to offend. And my own not locating or perceiving profound *theological* reasoning among the Tiber swimmers is not proof that there has been none.

It is all quite sad really. Yet we may all rest assured that our Lord sees the end from the beginning. Amid all our confusions, he is never confused.

Raymond J. Brown is a member of the board of directors of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, a participant in the Lutheran Coalition for Reform, and an occasional contributor to Forum Letter.

Our children's church

by Robert Schmidt



In 2010 the Pew Research Center reported that only 18% of the "millennial generation" attend church regularly. A more recent Pew study places the percentage of millennials who report they are "unaffiliated with any faith" at more than a third – up ten percent in five years. In the book *You Lost Me*, the Barna Group looked at why young people in this age group are leaving the church. In an earlier book, *UnChristian*, they examined what young people outside the church believed and why they were not in traditional churches. Parents and grandparents worry about what is happening and many pastors wonder why this generation, confirmed only a few short years before, are now missing when the church needs them the most.

In several years' time, this generation will constitute one third the population of America. This is likely to devastate traditional churches with the closure of congregations, the inability to pay church workers and their pensions, the loss of young people preparing for the ministry, and the joy departing from the ministry.

A "free conference"

In the "free conference" tradition of the

LCMS, a conference is being held at Valparaiso University, Aug. 2-4, 2015, on the subject of "Our Children's Church." The conference will focus what constitutes the "Good News" of Jesus to this generation, their calling to better the world, and their ability to communicate their faith to their peers. It will also discuss their "turn offs" to the faith with regard to science, gender issues, right wing politics, and limitations on leadership positions in the church.

There are several church communities that have not experienced the loss of this generation. Studies show that African-American churches have retained members of the generation better than white churches. Evidence suggests that feeling alienated from the white culture and finding support for their struggles within the black churches keeps younger African-Americans involved. For similar reasons visitors at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem are often struck by how active young Arabs are in that congregation.

Are millennials really different?

For white American churches, however, the question is whether congregations as presently constituted will be able to involve these young people. Might it be that millennials really have a different

culture, a different language, a different means of communication, and different value priorities? Even if the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were to modify its positions on women's ordination, creationism, gay marriage, and church fellowship, would it change anything? After all, liberal as well as evangelical churches reflect the loss of these same young people.

What if the church would look at the millennial generation in America and Europe as the largest "people group" who need to be reached with the Gospel in their own "heart language"? Missionaries to another culture quickly realize that they must learn the language as soon as possible, but they are aware that they will never master it like a native. In the new culture, they search for a connecting point that really conveys the good news of Christ's salvation. They cannot bring along all their ecclesiastical baggage and expect it to be quickly adopted. Instead, as soon as possible they seek to gather together a small community and in the pattern of Paul, equip the leaders.

Once communities are formed, with a little help they decide on where they will gather, what their community will look like, what they will do together, and above all what will be their mission, their purpose. Studies of the millennials reveal that many are very concerned about the environment, about the inequalities of our society, about reconciliation of enemies. What will be their ethics with regard to premarital sex, gay marriage, and other hot issues in the church? Time will tell, and guided by the Scriptures and the Spirit, the millennials themselves will decide.

How to reach millennials

Why would millennials want to meet? Perhaps to rest awhile, get refocused, find a little inspiration, get support to do the hard things, and encourage one another to endure. The music will come, as will the witness, the messages, and the meal. Sharing bread and wine, receiving Christ, starting over fresh, unhindered by guilt, they will, like previous generations, make plans to better the world. Will there be any connection with the church of their mothers, their fathers and their grandparents? Yes, there will be—if traditional churches act wisely.

When St. Paul gathered small communities together and blessed their leaders, he considered

them to be part of the church with its one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. He stayed in touch with the new congregations. With Timothy, Titus, Priscilla, Apollos and others, visits were frequent, letters were welcomed. How might these fledgling communities demonstrate their faith and their love? They sent gifts to the first church in Jerusalem to help the poor.

The best way to reach millennials will not be a better praise band, a gifted youth leader, or an increased budget. Much better might be for seminaries to educate, and the church to recognize, some in the millennial generation to be "apostolic missionaries" in the model of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and others. Theirs will be the task of learning the language, the web sites, finding the points of connection between the Gospel and the culture, gathering communities, blessing leaders and staying in touch. Would such "apostolic missionaries" be supported? Yes. Like St. Paul, they will be supported in one way or another.

What about doctrine?

But what about the doctrine? With centuries of development, debates, confessions, conflicts, and strife, those of us in the traditional churches, especially the LCMS, will have a hard time "letting go." The conference at Valparaiso will take a closer look at some of the "turn offs" for the millennial generation. What is the role of the church in the public square? What is the role of women in the church and society? Is a six-day creation the only possible interpretation of Genesis?

Dr. David Benke, President of the Atlantic District of the LCMS, will be the keynote speaker, followed by former missionary Dr. Robert Newton, Dr. Chad Lakies (a millennial himself), Dr. Elizabeth Goodine, and Dr. Matthew Becker. They will be joined in breakout groups by leaders discussing missional communities, peer ministries, deacons for the 21st century, campus ministries, and the Biblical view of men and women. Registration materials are available from Dot Nuechterlein at Valparaiso University <vudot@comcast.net>, and all are welcome.

Robert Schmidt is a retired LCMS pastor. He has taught at the Lutheran Seminary in Nigeria, served as a campus pastor in Colorado and Washington, and was Dean of Theological Studies at Concordia University, Portland. He has lectured on the "Ministry in Missionary Churches" in Germany, Japan, China, India and Kazakhstan.

An ecumenical first

by Robert Franklin



On April 19, 2015, I was present for a unique event in Christian history: the first consecration of a woman archbishop in Christendom. On that day in Milwaukee, WI, Pravests (Dean-Bishop) Lauma Zusevics was consecrated as the archbishop of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad (LELBAL, the acronym derived from the name in Latvian), an archdiocese with national churches in North America, Europe and Australia, including the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (LELCA). The new archbishop, pastor of the Milwaukee Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church, has served as president of this American church body for the past nine years, and has served as a vice-president of LELBAL. Ordained in 1978, she was the first woman to serve as a full-time minister in the LELCA. She was elected archbishop last October by LELBAL on the first ballot, receiving 140 of the 196 votes.

A church in exile

LELBAL was organized by Latvian Lutherans, who fled Latvia as Russians occupied their country after World War II. LELBAL is an active member of Lutheran World Federation and the Porvoo Communion, and a close sister church to the Lutheran Church in Latvia. LELBAL also, like the Church of Sweden, has preserved the apostolic succession. The Church of Sweden actually has had a woman archbishop since 2014, the Rev. Antje Jackelen; but in the Swedish church, the archbishop is one who has previously been consecrated a bishop, and is then simply installed to the office of archbishop. So Archbishop Lusevics is the first woman to be consecrated as archbishop.

In my more than fifty years as a pastor in the ALC /ELCA and seven years in LELBAL, I have been a participant in a number of significant events in the life of the church. I have witnessed several American Lutheran bishops' installations; I organized a 500th anniversary of Luther's birth in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Joliet, Illinois; I was intimately involved with the historic signing of an intercommunion agreement between the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA and the dioceses of Kentucky and Lexington of the Episcopal Church in

Louisville, Kentucky; I participated as visiting clergy in the impressive consecration of Episcopal Bishop Ted Gulick in Louisville. But I must admit that nothing has moved me as much as the consecration of my new Archbishop Lauma.

The passing of the crozier

The music was superb, with organists the Rev. Dr. Anita Gaide and Ernests Brusubadis III, and an enlarged Milwaukee combined chorus. Clergy from Europe, Australia and North America were led in procession by two crucifers. The consecration itself came early in the liturgy, following the Confession and Absolution. In the past, new archbishops were chosen after the death of the predecessor; in this instance, however, Archbishop Elmars Ernest Rozitis is retiring after 21 years in office, and so we witnessed the literal "passing of the crozier." A poignant moment occurred as Archbishop Rozitis began to remove his pectoral cross. He needed help in freeing it from his vestments before he could place it around the neck of Archbishop Lauma. He then gave her the ornate Crozier. Archbishop Rozitis filled his office with joy and affection, and it must have been difficult yet rewarding to pass on his office to Archbishop Lauma, with whom he has worked for many years.

In addition to Archbishop Rozitis, the consecrators were the Swedish Lutheran Bishop Ragnor Persenius of Uppsala, and ELCA Bishop Jeff Barrow of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Present also were the Irish Anglican Church's Archbishop Michael Jackson of Dublin, Latvia's Archbishop Janis Vanags of Riga and Bishop Einars Alpe of Daugavpils, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Barbins, Union of Latvian Baptists in America.

The Lutheran World Federation was represented by the Rev. Hans E. Kasch and Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke, Acting Director of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. Kirchenrat Klaus Rieth and the Rev. Markus Schoch were present from the German Lutheran churches. Representing the ELCA were Bishop Mary Frailand of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin and the Rev. Cindy Halmarson, ELCA Global Mission's Area Program Director for Europe,

the Middle East and North Africa.

The laying on of hands was accomplished by the entire congregation of more than 600, worshipping in Mt. Zion Lutheran Church (ELCA), by joining hands and then in turn joined with the ten worldwide LELBAL pravests (dean-bishops) who laid their hands on Archbishop Lauma's head, together with the three consecrators. Archbishop Lauma preached a two-part sermon, in Latvian and English. Holy Communion was celebrated with four

teams of lay leaders administering the bread and wine. The offering went to LELBAL's mission fund for work in India. The day concluded with a fellowship hour featuring hundreds of Latvian *piragi* and other delicacies.

The Rev. Robert Franklin is a retired pastor who has served both in the ELCA and LELBA. This is his first contribution to Forum Letter.

Omnium gatherum



Feeling welcome • Last time I mentioned that I had been licensed to serve in the local Episcopal diocese, after worshipping at this Episcopal parish for a year. The process took some months, during which I heard nothing from the diocese. Then one day at church the rector said, "Well, we just got back from the diocesan convention and they read your name, so I guess that means they approved you." (I subsequently got a copy of an official letter, dated five months earlier but apparently never mailed. Nice to know other denominational offices are sometimes kind of disorganized, too.) The very next Sunday, I was listed in the bulletin (along with a couple of other retired clergy) as an "associate priest" in the congregation, and, as I said last time, all three of us (along with the rector and the deacons) are prayed for by name each Sunday morning.

More about Baltic Lutherans • James Gale thinks that the note about Lutherans in the Baltic nations (March *FL*) missed a larger point, which is that the decline of Lutheranism there is part of a serious decline in Christian faith generally (one might almost call it a dechristianization). He cites a study produced by the European Commission (the executive body of the European Union) which asked people in various European nations which statement "comes closest to your beliefs": "I believe there is a God," "I believe there is some sort of spirit or life force," or "I don't believe there is any sort of spirit, God or life force." Belief in "a God" was lowest in Estonia of all the European nations (16%); Latvia was higher (37%), Lithuania the highest of the three (49%). The average "I believe there is a God" response across Europe was 52%, but there were striking differences

among countries, and also among different age groups, educational levels, and political persuasions. The report draws the following conclusion: "The results reveal some principal tendencies. The first being that there is seemingly a move away from religion in its traditional form — 'I believe there is a God' — which seems to affect the Protestant countries, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, as well as countries with a strong secular tradition such as France and Belgium. At the same time there is an affirmation of traditional religious beliefs in countries where the Church or Religious Institutions have been historically strong, notably, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland. In certain Eastern European countries, in spite of 40 or 50 years of communism, a strong attachment to religion emerges in Catholic countries such as Poland, Croatia and Slovakia. The third tendency is the development of a new kind of religion characterised by the belief that 'there is some sort of spirit or life force.' This new religion or spirituality is more marked in certain Protestant countries, such as Sweden or Denmark as well as in the Czech Republic and Estonia." Quite a sobering analysis. You can read the survey itself at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf.

Library surprise • Last month I mentioned that I had long since given away my copy of Neuhaus's and Berger's *Movement and Revolution*. I was in the Graduate Theological Union library the other day and thought, just for fun, that I'd check it out and look it over again, so I did so and brought it home. When I got to the "looking it over" part, I was startled to see my name written on the flyleaf. Apparently when I gave it away, it was to the GTU library.

Nice to know that a book I donated actually ended up in the library's collection and not on the used book sales table.

Apologies • You probably received your May issue of *FL* very late, for which we apologize. The fellow at our printing company who handled *FL* has retired, and so far things don't seem to be going very smoothly. We're monitoring the situation and hope the problem won't happen again. But remember, you can get *FL* as a pdf file via email; if you'd like to do that, contact Donna at dkralph@aol.com.

New from ALPB • The papers from the fifth CORE theological conference have been published as *Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed*. The book includes papers by Stephen Hultgren, David Yeago, Mark Granquist, Amy Schiffrin, and Christopher Seitz. It can be ordered at alpb.org. Papers from previous years are also available.

Channeling? • I always now read and enjoy the "back page" in *The Lutheran* where Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton holds forth. In the May issue, her column was headlined, "Worship is the heart of all we do," and she certainly made the case for that assertion. My favorite sentences: "We are a liturgical church. There is a certain humility and beautiful communion in not trying to reinvent the service each time, but to join with brothers and sisters throughout the world and across the centuries. And please, please do not rewrite the creeds." Some wiseacre on Facebook suggested that she was channeling me. I doubt it; she has better sense than that. But she does certainly have it right.

"Great little publication" • The Associated Church Press awards for 2014 were announced in May, and we are pleased to report that *Forum Letter* received the Award of Excellence (translation: first place) in the "Best in class: newsletter" competition. We've been recognized as one of the three "best in class" recipients nearly every year now since 2009, but this is only the second time we've been given the Award of Excellence. The judge's comment: "Great little publication, packed with information. Serves intended audience very well." We like that summary. Reading through the very LONG list of awards in some 81 categories, I tried to pick out the Lutheran ones – a challenge since few of the publications actually have "Lutheran" in the title. From what I could see, among Lutherans it was the LCMS publications that cleaned up, with numerous awards being won by LCMS Communications, *Lutherans Engage the World*, *Concordia Journal*, the LCMS Leader Blog, *Lutheran Witness*, *Concordia Journal* and *Concordia Seminary Magazine*. The only ELCA awards went to WELCA publications *Café* and *Gather*. We were the lone "independent Lutheran" winner, but then there aren't many others left. Still, congratulations to all.

Success! • I always enjoy reading the judges' comments in the ACP competition. One of the articles we submitted was my piece on "Liturgical Chaos" (April 2014). The judge opined: "Early on, the writer says: 'Since my retirement, I've been asked to do "pulpit supply" a few times – fewer, actually, than I would have imagined.' This story, while entertaining, is not likely to get him more invitations." He says that as if it's a bad thing. – *roj*

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