

Southeastern
Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Faithful Witness:

Wrestling with Calling & Proclamation
in a Polarizing Time

Rev. Dr. Anthony Bateza



1

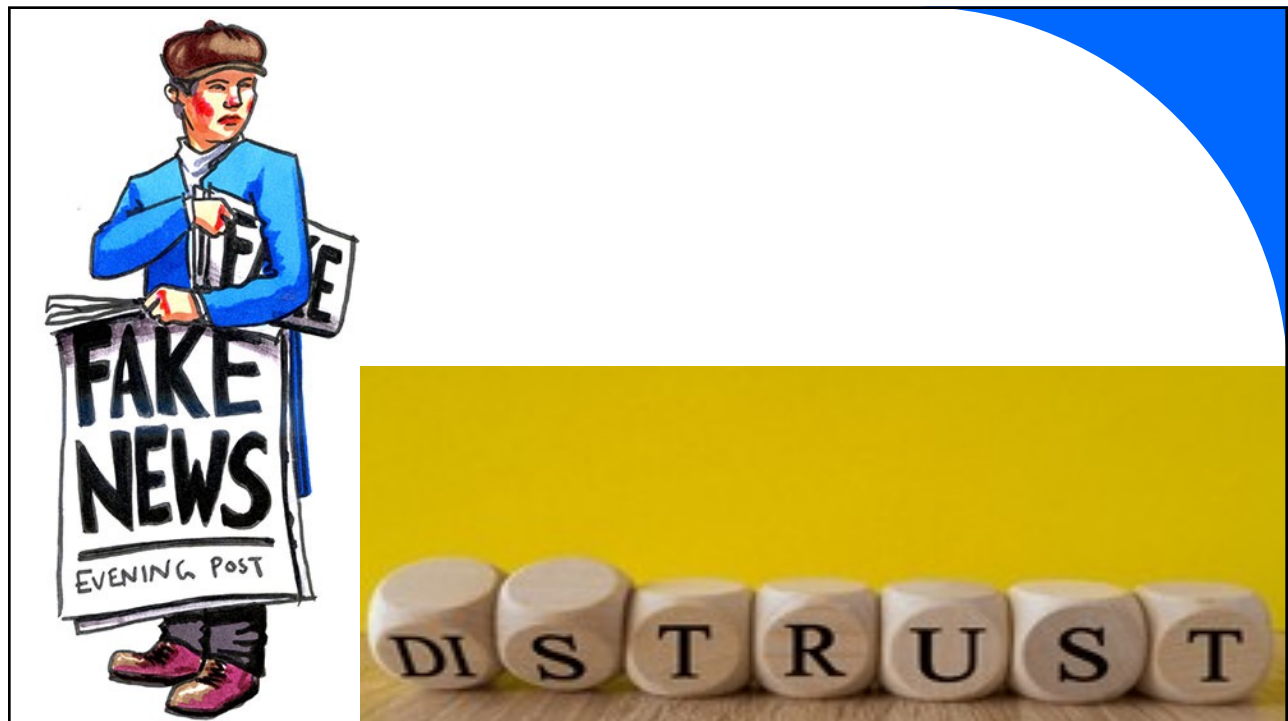
Now the Lord came and stood there,
calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!”
And Samuel said, “Speak, for your
servant is listening.”

- 1 Samuel 3:10

2



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5

RELIGION

Anti-Christian hostility reaching 'unprecedented' levels in culture, government under Biden, observers warn

Anti-Christian sentiment is increasingly emerging from state and corporate actors, multiple nonprofit leaders say
By **Jon Brown** · Fox News

Published April 13, 2023 2:00am EDT



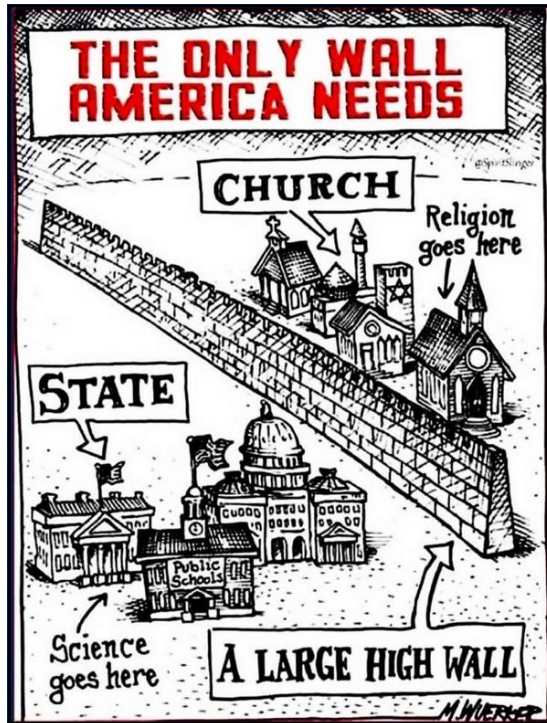


CHRISTIANS ARE UNDER ATTACK IN AMERICA

WITH JON HARRIS



6



RollingStone

COMMENTARY

The Supreme Court Sold Its Soul to the Christian Right

It's their court now, and we're just living under it — for now

BY JAY MICHAELSON

7



© fizkes, istockphoto

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10

Guiding Questions

How do we live and labor as the church in these conditions?

What insights can we draw from Lutheran theology?

11

Overview

Session 1 – Vocation and a Cacophony of Voices

Session 2 – The “**FREEDOM**” of a (Rostered) Christian*?

Session 3 – RSVP: Proclamation as Invitation

Session 4 – The Fullness of Faith

12

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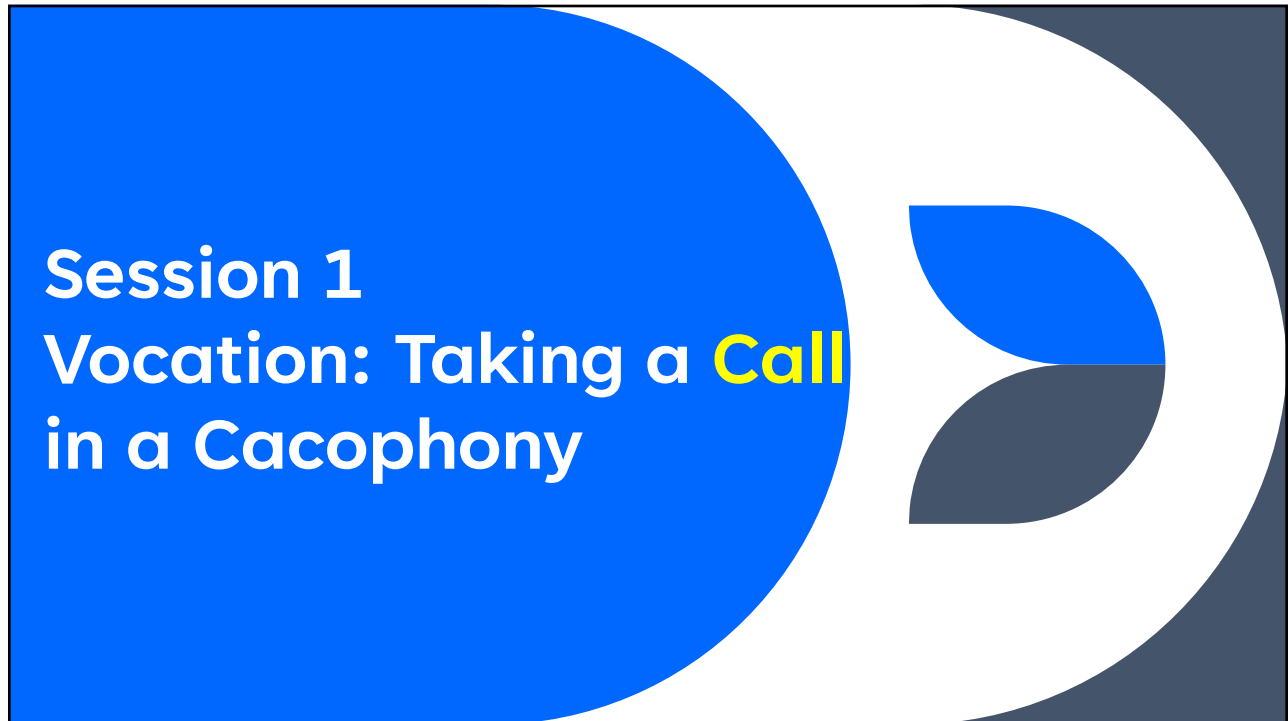
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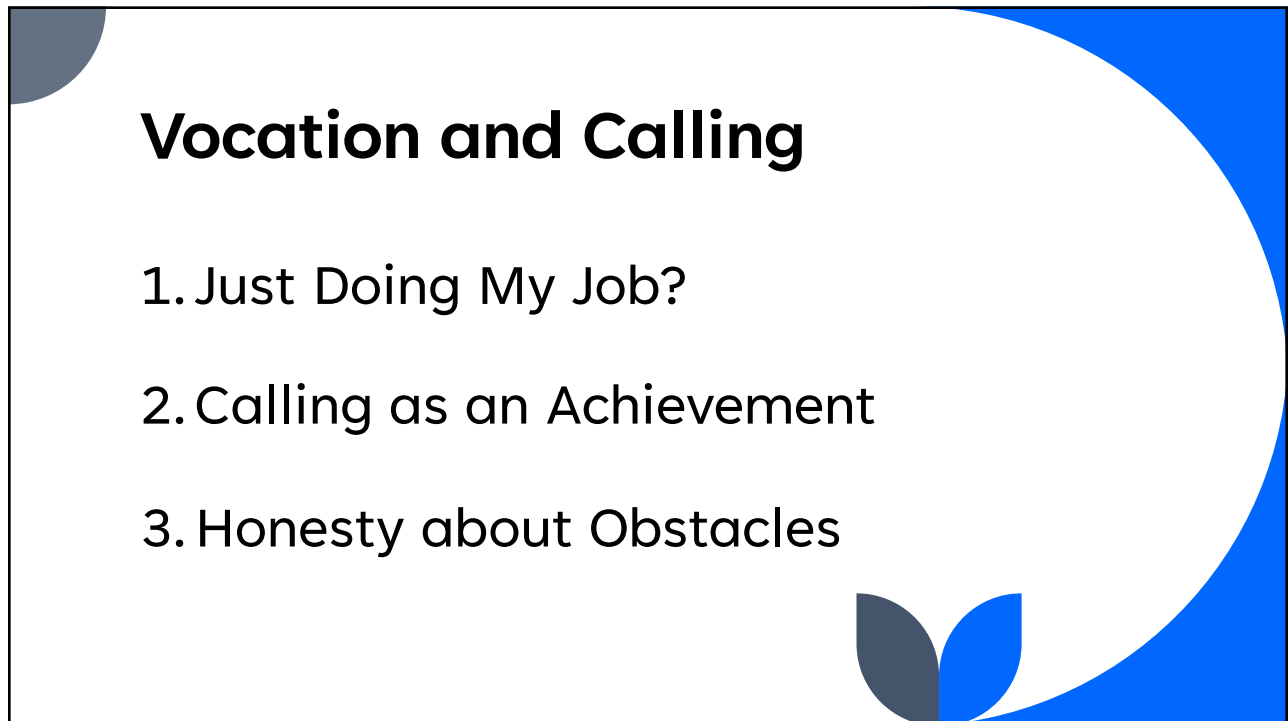
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Vocation: Just Doing My Job

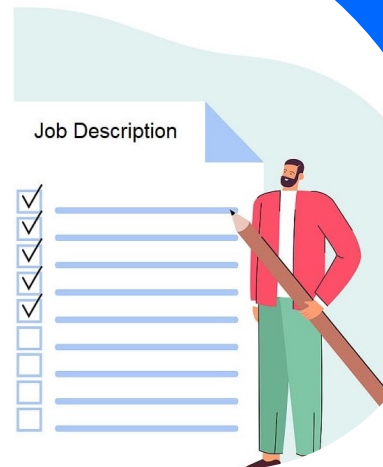


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Just Doing My Job...

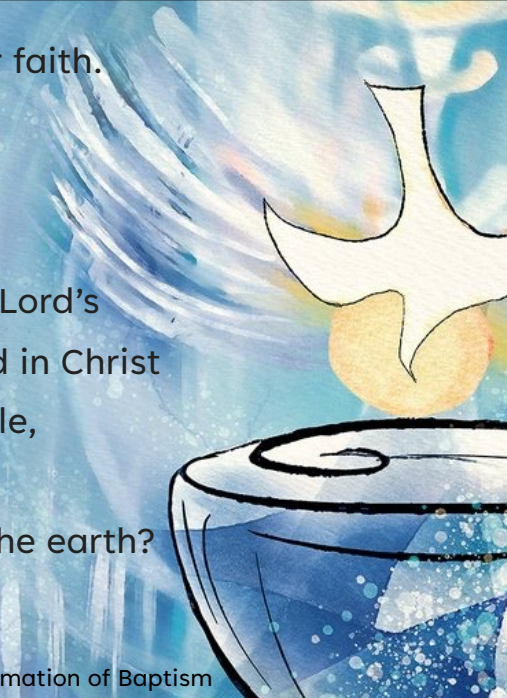
Despite a penchant for polemics and hyperbole, Luther grounds his work in modest claims about his job description.

- As a professor, he is required to teach
- Allowed, and even encouraged, to examine teachings and practices that are not settled.



8

“You have made a public profession of your faith.
Do you intend to continue in the covenant
God made with you in holy baptism:
to live among God’s faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s
supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ
through word and deed, to serve all people,
following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?
I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.”
- Affirmation of Baptism




9

Every minister of Word and Sacrament shall:

7) **witness** to the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad; and

8) **speak publicly** to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, **advocating** dignity, justice, and equity for all people, **working** for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and **embracing and welcoming** racially and ethnically diverse populations.

- ELCA model constitution



10

“...care for God’s people, bear their burdens, **and do not betray their confidence.**”

Serve the needy, care for the sick, comfort the distressed, and, **through words and actions, witness faithfully** to God’s love for all people.

Cross every barrier that stands between the church and its ministry in the world.

Seek out those places **where the gospel of Jesus Christ meets the world’s need...**

Ordination vows and ELCA Constitution, Deacons

Every minister of Word and Service shall...

Advocate a **prophetic diakonia** that commits itself to risk-taking and innovative service on the frontiers of the Church’s outreach, giving particular attention to the suffering places in God’s world;



11

Getting Political?



12

The PROPHEPIC Imagination

John the Baptist
(not actual photo, image, or likeness)



The PASTORAL Imagination



What motivates our images and desires:

- Duty and expectations?
- Concrete impact vs. ethereal effects?
- Anger about injustice?
- Care for the congregation?
- Love of God?

13

- Duty and expectations?
- Concrete impact vs. ethereal effects?
- Anger about injustice?
- Care for the congregation?
- Love of God?

Turn to a Neighbor

Which motivations and desires do you notice in yourself when thinking about prophetic work?

14

Calling as an Achievement



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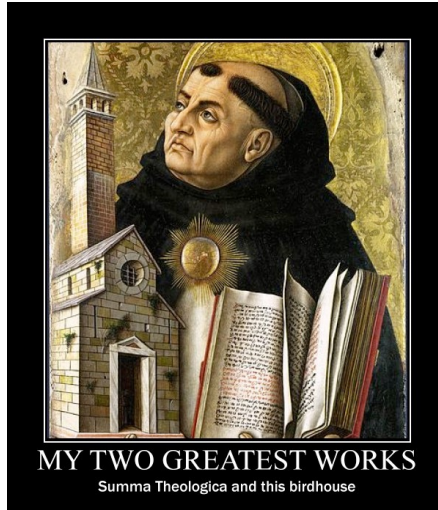
Called Together

- We should think of vocation or calling as something ***made, constructed, and lived through***...not inherited or given.
- Ambiguous but determinate
 - The presumption of being too rigid or too flexible.
 - Leaves one non-responsive to growth and context
- Need examples and criteria to test better and worse
- Need a community to do all of the above!

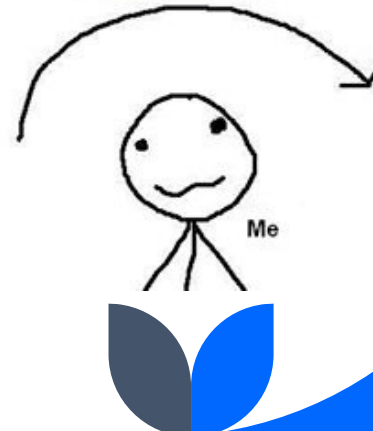
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A Virtuous Interlude

As a general rule, Lutherans don't talk about virtue and figures like Thomas Aquinas



Aquinas



17

A Virtuous Interlude

- The people who **do** talk about Aquinas and virtue tend to be white conservative men.
- What we are missing
 - The virtue tradition emphasizes habit formation, the subtle and obvious ways we are shaped by our environments (resources, family, friends, choices, etc.)
 - Exposed to excessive and deficient abilities, emotions,
 - Draws our attention to EXEMPLARS, figures living and dead that represent certain ideals (e.g., courage, justice).

18

A Virtuous Interlude

Unlike rocks, we are complicated creatures

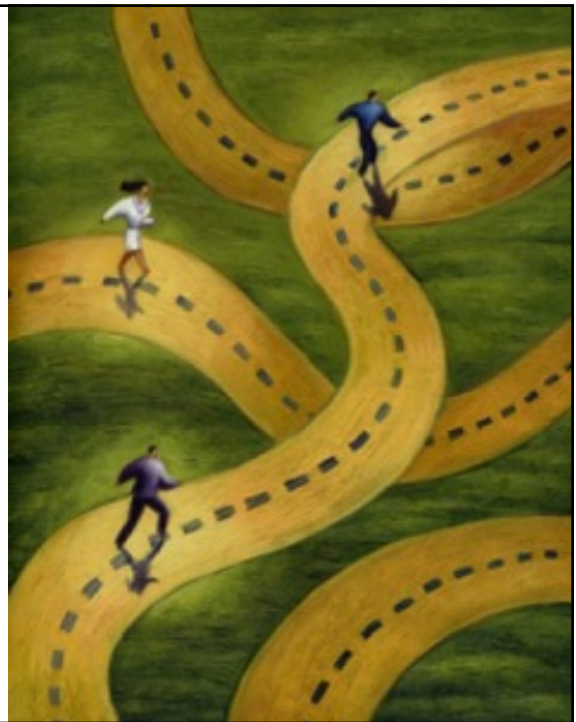


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More similar to birds...

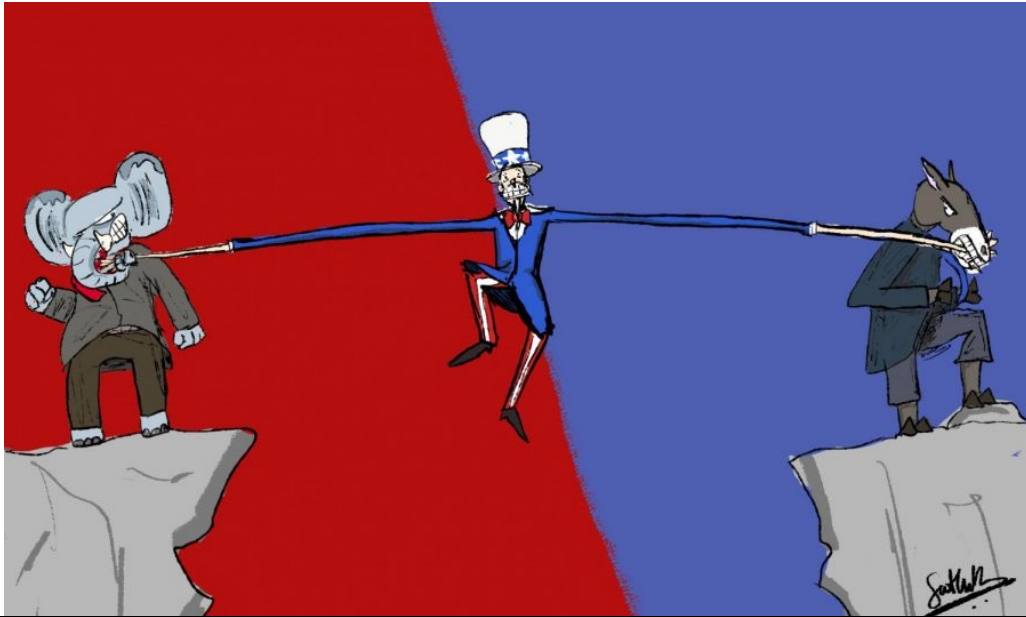


but still different



20

Virtue among the Polarized?



21

Pulled Apart

In a polarized environment:

- Positions are expected/demanded
- What one person sees as justice feels false and coerced by another (e.g., political correctness)
- Fed through the binary of friend/enemy.



22

Turn to a Neighbor

Can you describe an exemplar in your life that you are inspired by and yet vehemently disagree with?

23

Pulled Apart

In a polarized environment:

- Beliefs, feelings, and actions are not revisable
- Or, revision is expected to fit a clear conversion narrative.



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A Vulnerable Church



- There are fewer Christians in the United States, fewer Lutherans, and less presumed honor and social standing for the church.
- Rostered leaders like to eat, pay bills, get medical care...

Varying responses to our vulnerabilities:

- Engagement for the sake of relevance
- Attack – culture wars recruiting soldiers.
- Retreat, literal (Benedict Option, Hauerwasian) or theological satisfying (Christian identity, Gospel)

25

Vulnerability: Finding the Mean

- There are some things we ought not feel vulnerable about, and many times when people who are *already* made vulnerable are asked to bear more.
- Right now, we are thinking about cases when vulnerability is good or justifiable, and how it goes better or worse.

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Too little Vulnerability

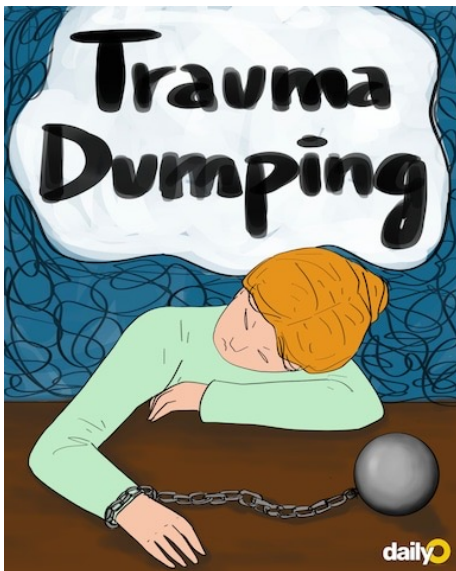


"If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if you are a true evangelist, first let men know that you are a sinner, and then tell them the gospel of God. Do not save the people who are only fake sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."

– LW 48:281 (edited)

27

Too MUCH vulnerability



"Now, all of us are debtors to one another; therefore we should and we may confess publicly in everyone's presence, no one being afraid of anyone else..."

Besides this] there is also secret confession that takes place privately between a single brother or sister [sic]."

– Large Catechism, *Brief Exhortation to Confession*

28

Calling and Selective Listening

- Our theology, practices, and institutions will replicate and magnify our mistakes.
- Cutting through the cacophony of voices, the dizzying mix of desires and options, requires finding those people we can listen to and being those people for others.

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Communities of Saints



30

Turn to a Neighbor

Who is in your
community of saints,
and what role do you
play in that group?



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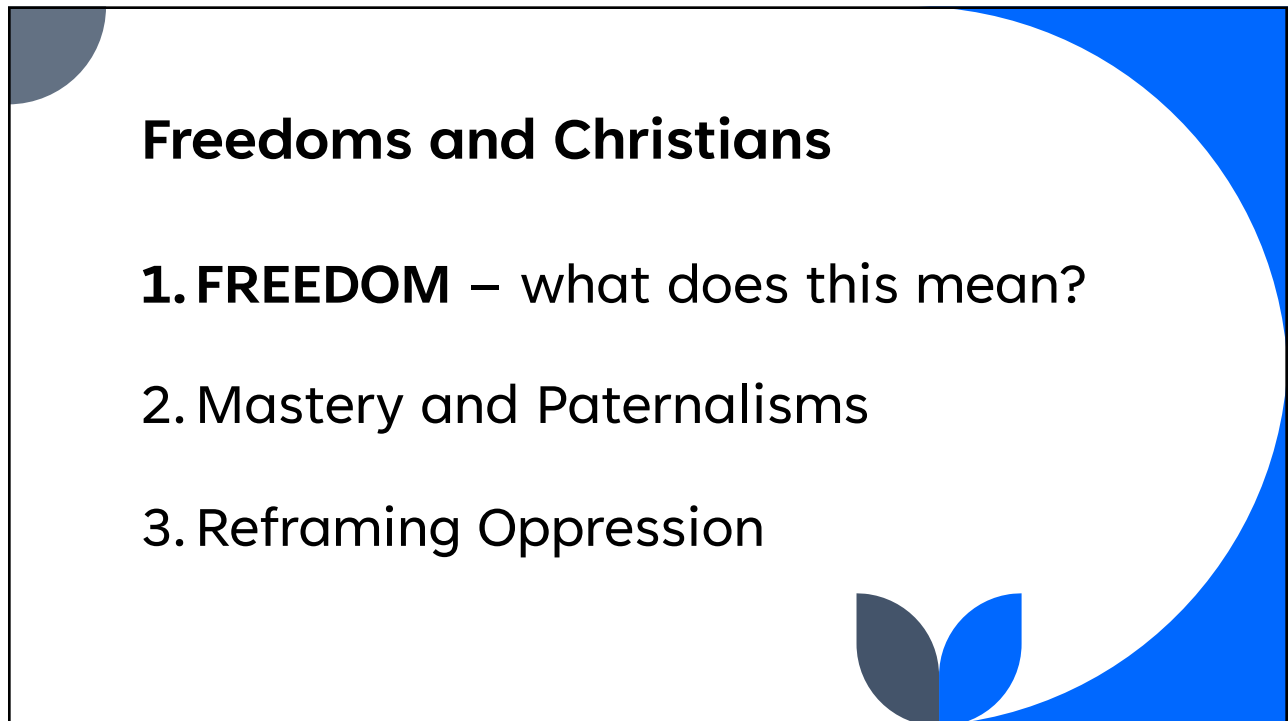
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American Love of FREEDOM



5

Lutheran Love of FREEDOM

- Martin Luther's name was, of course, not Luther....Luder
- Drawn to the idea of freedom (*elutheria*), and as was common he tweaked his name just as his friend Phil Darkdirt.



6

Lutheran Love of **FREEDOM**

The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none.

The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.



7

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard...he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ...when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'



8

There was a plantation owner who ...he leased his land to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his cotton. ...when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'



9

Parables as Subversive Speech

William R. Herzog II

Jesus
as
Pedagogue
of the
Oppressed



Not always clear what Jesus is doing with the parables, who is the hero or villain, or if God is supposed to be read into some figure.

Presumptions about who is right or wrong overdetermine our reading of texts.

10

Back to Luther....

The Christian individual is a **completely free** lord of all, subject to none.

The Christian individual is a completely **dutiful servant** of all, subject to all.

What do “freedom” and “servitude” mean here?

11

Lutheran Images of FREEDOM

Instead of a definition, what images, metaphors, and practices does Luther offer?

- Liberation from anxiety and fear.
- Ability to do your job, critique of papal flatterers and cheats.
- Stoic freedom: even in chains



12

“This can be proven by a simple argument. How can it benefit the soul if the body is in good health, free and active, eating and drinking what it pleases, when even the most ungodly slaves to complete wickedness may overflow in such things? On the other hand, how could poor health or captivity, hunger or thirst, or any external misfortune harm the soul...Not one of these things touches upon the freedom or servitude of the soul.



- *Freedom of a Christian*

13

Conceptions of Freedom

Common references to negative and positive freedom, freedom *from* vs. freedom *for*.

Alternatively, talk of freedom as

- A. Unobstructed action, to do as you will.
- B. Non-domination: to not be subject to the capricious or arbitrary control of another.

14

Unobstructed vs. Non-Domination



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The relationship of master to enslaved is often paradigmatic, the example of what is or is not desired.



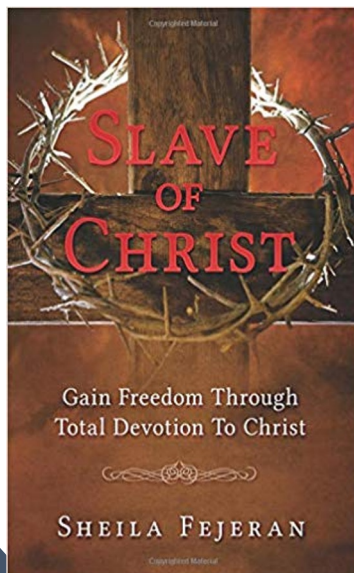
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A Different Understanding?

- Oppression is a slippery idea, with a lot of people using it in very different ways.
- Not all examples or experiences fit the Master/Enslaved paradigm.
- What if oppression is understood as a situation where one person pays a higher cost just for asking questions about the situation?



17



18

Turn to a Neighbor

In your context, have you wrestled with the mastery and enslavement language of our traditions?

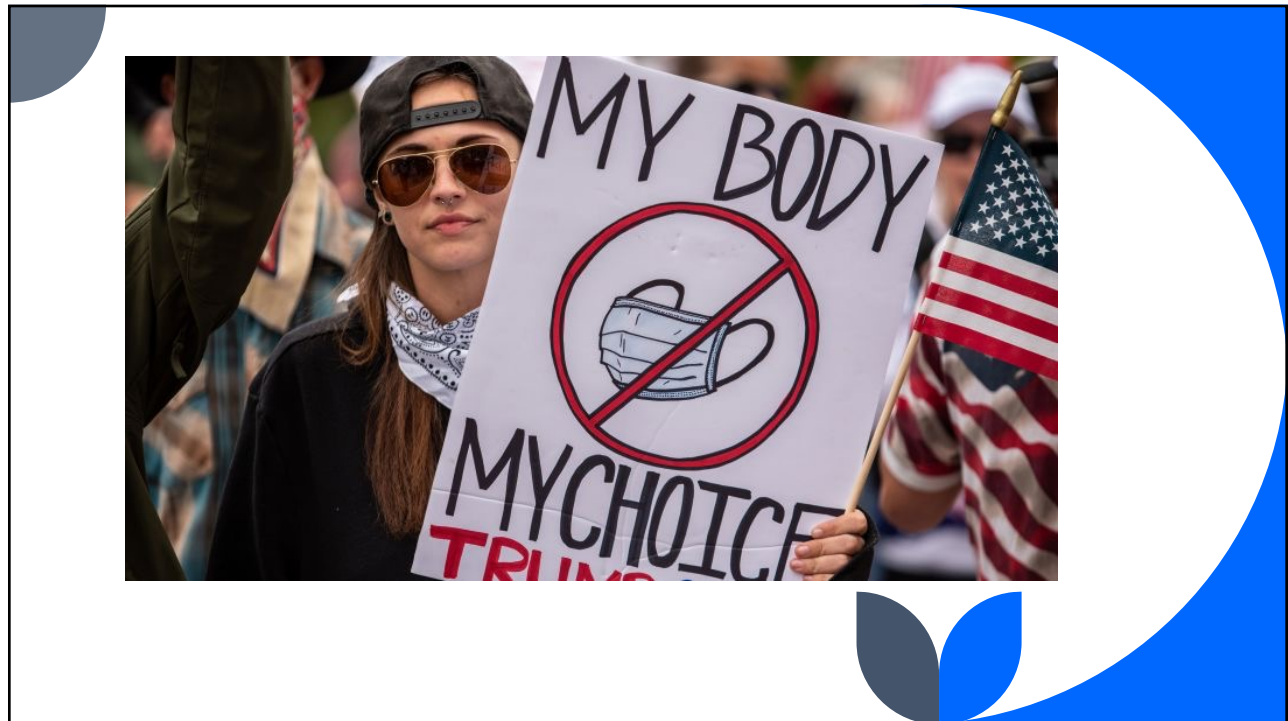
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Freedom and Paternalism Debates

Even the shift to freedom as non-domination leaves some questions unanswered:

- Who has the power to ensure non-domination?
- What about using power for the good of another?

20



21

Freedom and Paternalism Debates

Augustine, Luther, and much of the Western tradition have emphasized that it is better to be controlled for your own good.



22

Ideal Ruler..."Father"...Pastor...Deacon

- The **Law** that accuses and the lawgiver that curbs sin
 - A not-so-covert antisemitism.
 - Luther's examples are always children, criminals, or the insane



23

Ideal Ruler..."Father"...Pastor...Deacon

- Freedom is a new and improved bondage?
 - Emphasis on gratitude for being set free from bad rulers (Pope, Satan) but less clarity on what good agency and reciprocity with God and others means.



24

German Peasants War

Handlung / Freichel vnd Instruction / so fügen
men worden sein vnn allen Bortenn vnd
hauffen der Daurer / so sich samen
verpflicht haben. M: D: xxv:



Peasant Band, Ulrich Schmid:

[We should follow] “...that divine law, that pronounces to each estate what it must do or not do.”

Royal Representative:

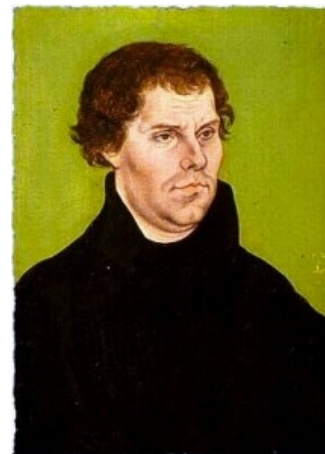
“Dear Ulrich, you ask for divine law. Tell us who will pronounce such law? God will hardly come down from heaven and hold a court session for us!”

25

Luther's Response

Step 1: Point out that all parties are wrong, emphasizing that the peasants are revolting because of their horrific condition and treatment by the rich and powerful.

Step 2: Encourage deliberation, coming to agreement about just laws and better treatment.



26

Luther's Response

Step 3: Assume that all reports of violence are accurate, that law and order need to be restored, and tell the princes and soldiers to start stabbing and hacking people to death.

Step 4: When asked to apologize or retract, DOUBE DOWN!



27



28

Turn to a Neighbor

How have you centered reciprocity in your ministry and work?

Where do you struggle to take on, or let go, of power or control?

29

A Different Understanding?

- What would it mean for us to center reciprocity and growth over coercion and control? What risks would this bring, and could we accept them as individuals and institutions?
- What if oppression is understood as a situation where one person pays a higher cost just for asking questions about the situation?

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Recapping **FREEDOM**

- What words can or should we use?
 - Slave, Lord, Servant, Service...
- Costs and benefits of different “freedom” language
 - Shifting the question from precise definitions to constellations of images and practices
 - Discernment about situations and the choices we are, or are not, making.

3

Session 3 PROCLAMATION as *INVITATION*

4

Proclamation as Invitation

1. Learning with Luther

- a. Powerful words
- b. (Un)necessary relationships

2. Invitation as a social practice

- a. Philosophical lessons
- b. Theological grounding
- c. Political value

5



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What does it mean
to *learn with Luther*?

8

Learning as telling Stories

"What do you have that you did not receive?"
(1 Cor. 4:7a)

- St. Olaf's mission – "nourished by the Lutheran tradition"
- The images, values, ideas, feelings, and practices we have received are a potent mix.
- Life giving and indigestible bits...



9

Learning as telling Stories



Rahel Jaeggi

How to explain the phenomena of alienation and social criticism?

- Instead of imposing external criteria, asking about inner tensions and ruptures.
- Alienation as a misappropriation of the world and ourselves.
- Ways of being that create blockages to previous lessons.

10

Learning with Luther

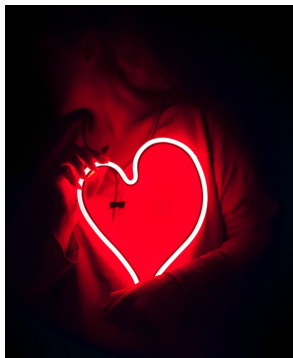
How is Luther, just like us, trying to digest his world?

- Rich and sumptuous feast of theological and political insights
- Frequent gastrointestinal challenges



11

The Power of Words



- We are shaped by what we hear
- The ear is connected to the heart and mind
- Translations that *meet people and move them.*
- Music as theology exemplified.



12

A **Lust** for Power

- Failures to recognize who and what we are, our limitations and possibilities.
- Language of pride, presumption, and despair.
- Too much, or too little, love of God, self, and neighbor.
- Paper over limits with false pursuits of sovereignty and mastery.



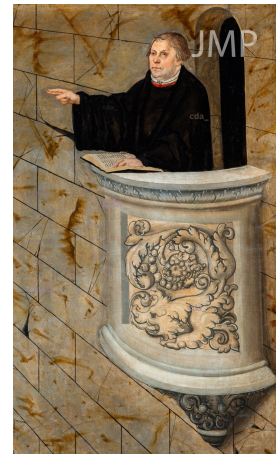
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GOD'S Lust for Power?



Is Luther always pointing to Christ as he lived, died, and lives again?

Does Luther make God too independent?



14

AN INDEPENDENT GOD...?

Example 1: Sacramentology

Amidst debates about the need for confession and the worthy reception of the Lord's Supper



15

An Independent God

Example 2: Justification

- Even as he emphasizes God's gift and promises of salvation, Luther slips into arguments about these being lost by us through our errors and mistakes.
- Biblical witness, rhetorical force, lingering Pelagianism, power to accuse?



16

An Independent God

Example 3: Creation...Sin...?

- Luther, like all good theologians, struggles with what to do about Eden, sin, freedom and blame.
- Solving theodicies puzzles or creating new challenges?



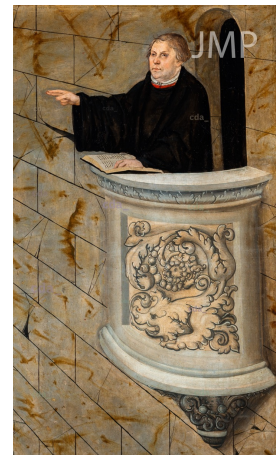
Losing Paradise,
by James He Qi

17

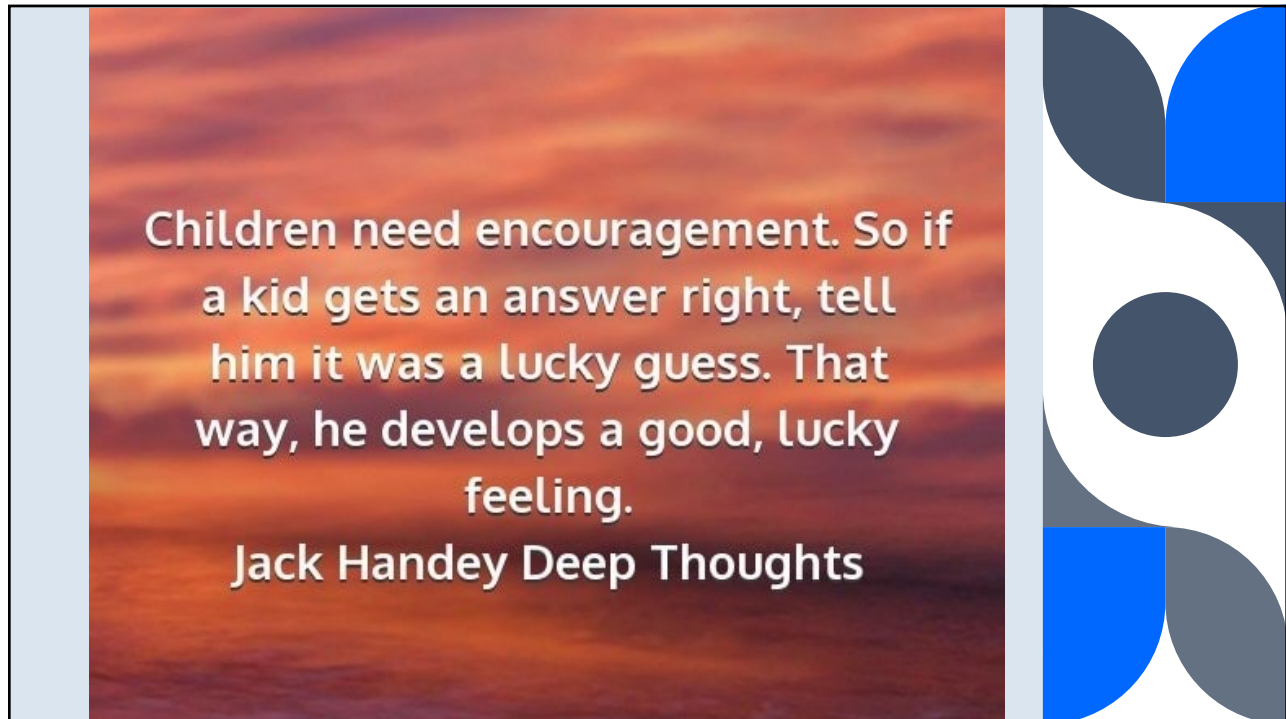
Leaving out the Audience



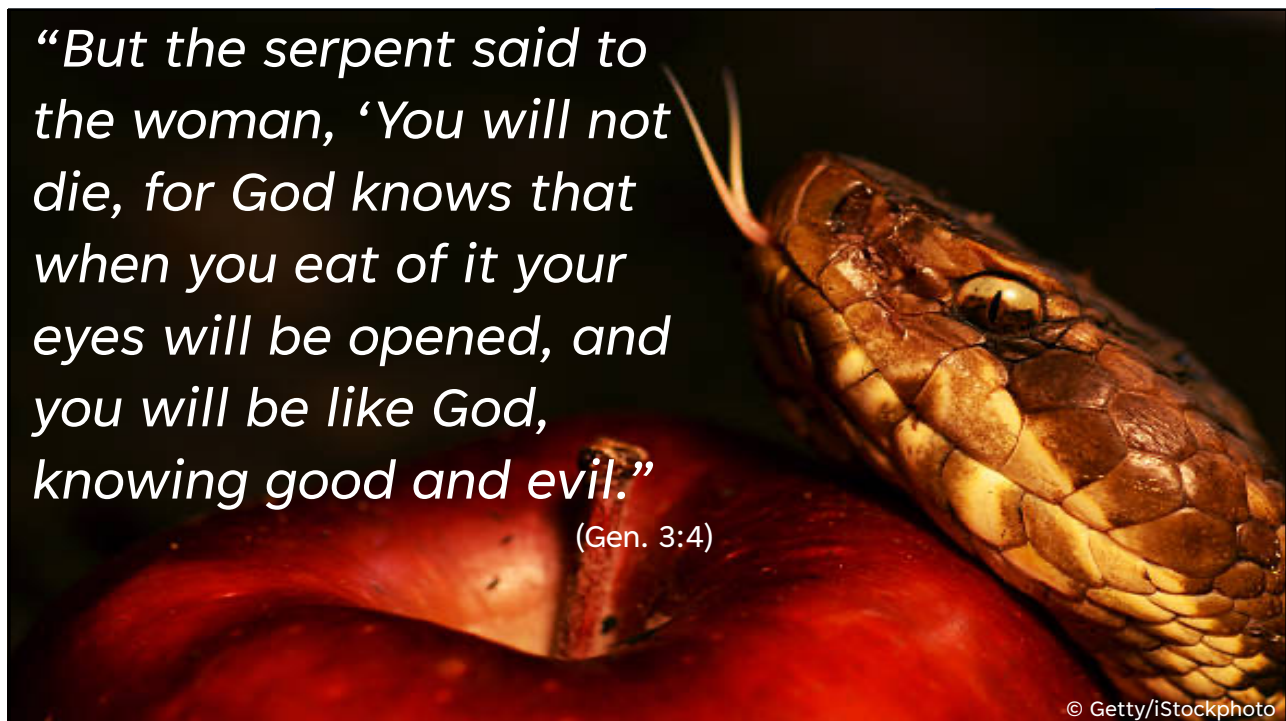
Is Luther pointing to Christ at the expense of those for whom Christ lives?



18



19



20

Turn to a Neighbor

In what ways do we cast
God in the serpent's image?

21

Proclamation as Invitation



PARTY INVITATION

You're Invited to Celebrate with Us!

SATURDAY, 21 AUGUST
Street Address, Number, Instructions

Please bring: [Contribution Here]
RSVP TO: [Name and contact info]

22

Invitations versus Commands

Invitations are different from commands in a number of ways:

- Can be accepted or not, no compulsion or coercion even if there are positive/negative consequences.
- Appeal to reasons that the invited and the invitee hope to share, not pure authority

23



How can invitations, the act of *inviting*, go wrong?

24



“If a speech act gets no uptake at all, then it does not succeed in making a difference in the social world”

- Quill R. Kukla

25

Types of Refusals

1. Open-Call: Option to refuse is built into the practice [e.g., **invitations**]
2. Transgressive: acknowledge authority but knowingly reject it.
3. Entitlement Challenge: The speaker lacks authority or standing.
4. Reconstitutive: redefining the speech act.

- From Quill R. Kukla, “Uptake and Refusal” (2023)

26

Practical Impacts: Discursive Injustice

When you are not taken to be saying or doing the kinds of things you intend because of social prejudices and systemic injustices (command/invitation)



27

Practical Impacts: Trans Identity



Trans-Identity claims get bogged down in ontology (what *is* gender, criteria for categories)

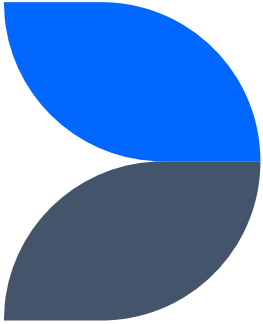
Misses that claims are being made for acknowledgment and ethical treatment, different practices and rules for how those are received or rejected

28

Turn to a Neighbor
In what ways are you
misheard by your
community?
In what ways have you
misheard them?

29

Session 4
Faith and the
FULLness
of trust

A stylized logo consisting of two overlapping leaf-like shapes. The top shape is blue and the bottom shape is dark grey. They are positioned within a white circular area that is partially cut off by the right edge of the slide.

30

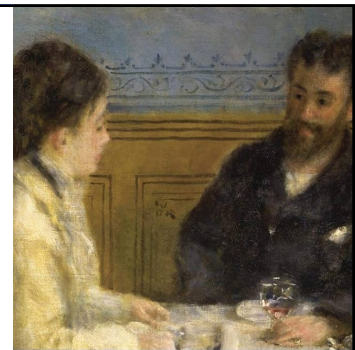
Faithful Witness

1. Sharing Reasons
2. Faith as Trust: How the Bible Got Luther Right
3. Trust as Commitment & Competence

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Reasoning as Social

- We tend to think of “reasoning” as something we do alone, in our heads.
- Better to think of reasoning as something we do together, in the offering and receiving of reasons.
- A group project through and through.



REASONING *A Social Picture*

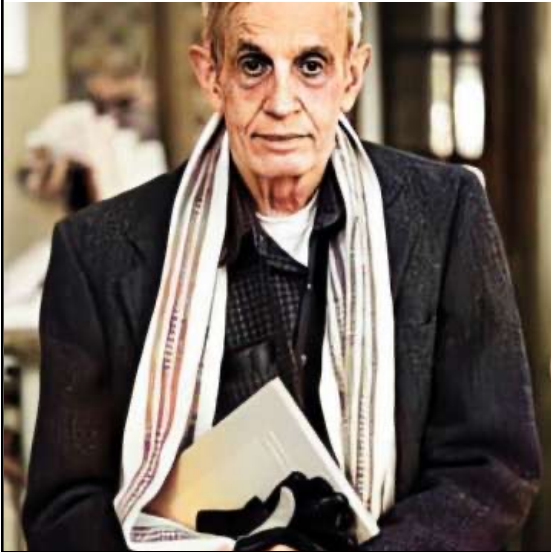
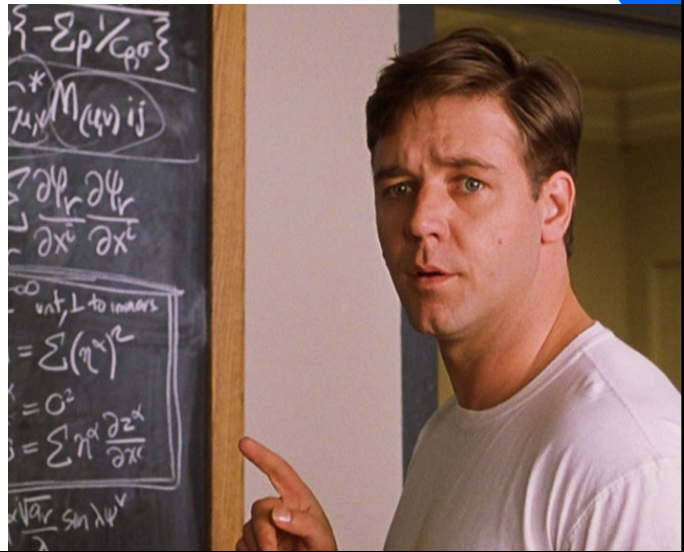
ANTHONY SIMON LADEN

OXFORD



32

Mathematician John Nash

Russell Crowe,
A Beautiful Mind (2001)

33

Reasoning as Social

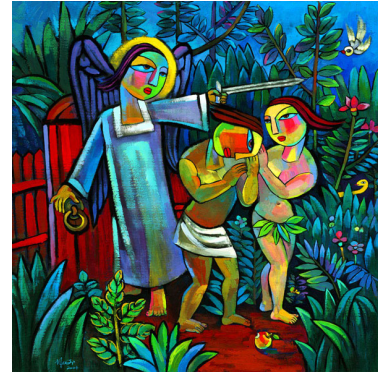


34

The (Un)Necessary Other

Expulsion from the Garden of Political Community

- Obvious examples: insurrection, cancellation, silencing.
- Less obvious: prophetic assurance, quietism, resignation, surrender



Losing Paradise,
by James He Qi

35

Faithful Witness

1. Sharing Reasons

2. Faith as Trust: How the Bible Got Luther Right

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Luther's World

Sixteenth century theology had carefully divided up the labor of different virtues and practices.

- Faith concerned propositional knowledge of revealed truths (God, scripture, doctrine)
- Even demons can have faith, they know who Jesus is, but it moves them to hate instead of love.



37

Luther's Alternative

Luther made faith central to his theology

- Ends up doing all the work of love, hope, and a lot of other virtues.
- Definition fuzzy – activity and importance crystal clear.

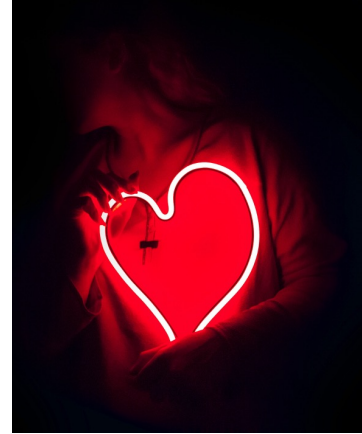


38

Luther's Alternative

Faith becomes a trust in God and the promises of God.

- Releases anxiety
- God of the gaps is gone
- Calls God honest and trustworthy, God does what God says God will.



39

FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Morgan argues that

- New Testament describes faith as trust and commitment
- Accepting the consequences of one's faith.
- Committed as Christ was, and not an action or achievement but something undergone.



Teresa Morgan

40

FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Trust and faith “are relationship forming and can constitute the whole of a relationship”



Teresa Morgan

Morgan, “Faith in Dialog” (2018)

41

Turn to a Neighbor

Describe someone in your life that you trust, and why you trust them.

42

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DECIDING TO TRUST?



Pamela Hieronymi

Not clear that we can decide, choose, or move ourselves to trust another.

Why?

- Trust for reasons that count towards someone's trustworthiness.
- Other reasons (necessity, expediency, encouragement) not quite trust.



44

BEING TRUSTWORTHY



Katherine Hawley

Thinking about trust as the coming together of commitment and competence.

- Is the other committed to some action, not just reliable.
- Can they deliver on their commitments?

45

TAKING ON TOO MUCH...

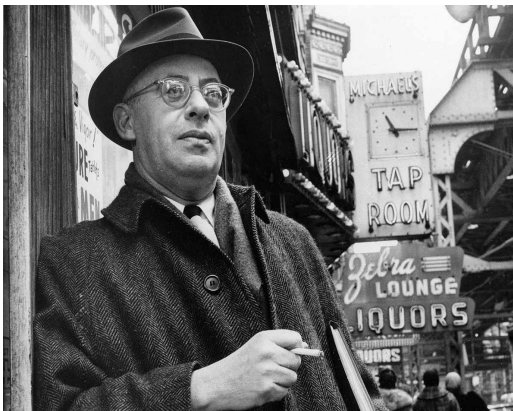


46

LACK OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE



47



“Never do for others
what they can do
for themselves.”

- Saul Alinsky



48

“religious life is public life. It’s about making a difference and doing the difficult work of seeking justice in a society. It’s the work of the Gospel—we must take action to achieve justice.”

- *Roots for Radicals*



Sister Mary Beth Larkin

49

Things Can Always Go Wrong...

In the Large Catechism, Luther discusses the petition to “lead us not into temptation”

Highlights that no matter how good we are, how strong individually or institutionally, there is always the Devil...



50

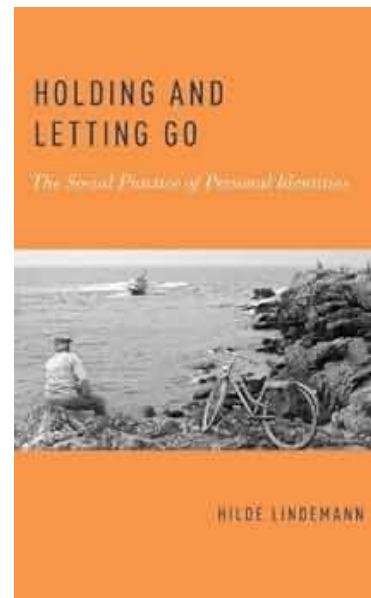
How do we fight the Devil... *Together*

51

Holding and Letting Go

Our personhood is not found in some essence, but in one another.

- The things we hold on to, and let go of, with each other.



52

How Long do we Hold On?



Nicholas Kompridis



53



54

Communities of Saints



55