



Prayer and Planes

Two planes, two outcomes. In January 2009 a plane in trouble landed safely in the Hudson River. All crew and passengers were saved.

A month later another plane in trouble crashed outside of Buffalo, New York, killing all 50 people on board.

In both planes people prayed. In one plane everyone was saved; in the other, everyone was killed. What do we say about prayer and planes?

“His number was up,” “It’s fate,” “It’s God’s will,” – are all things we commonly hear after tragedies like plane crashes.

Why bother praying? What good does it do?

C. S. Lewis, Pascal slip up. C.S. Lewis wrote that prayer “is either a sheer illusion or a personal contact” between our broken selves and a personal God.

Centuries before, the great Christian thinker Pascal wrote something similar. He set up what is called the wager argument, that is, if there is no God, prayer does not matter, but if God exists, why not take a chance and pray?

Both Lewis and Pascal err because they assume Christ and the cross are not central in prayer. They wrongly assume everyone has direct access to the Father apart from the Son.

This error is commonplace today. Many people think like this: “I’m spiritual. Therefore I am religious in my own way. I pray; all religions are equal; therefore all prayer is equal. I have nice thoughts about God. I have nice feelings about God. Therefore I am spiritual.”

In C.S. Lewis’ great Christian classic, *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior devil advises a young devil-in-training whose job it is to lead a young man astray. The senior devil gives this kind of advice: Encourage spirituality. It’s one of the best things we have going for us. If your young man can only focus on cultivating his soul and thinking about his spirituality. . . .

Persuade your young man to go on retreats and learn about silence, meditation, and prayer. Even the Lord’s Prayer is fine as long as it’s done the way most people mean it – “My kingdom come,” and “My will be done.”

Let your young man think that what is most important is that he have the right thoughts. Keep him from praying “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done.” Keep him from praying “in Jesus’ name.”

The Screwtape Letters rightly captures how people rationalize: I’m spiritual. I’m religious and so is everybody else, and it’s all equal.

The misuse and the proper use of Scripture. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find . . .” (Matt 7:7-11) – is one of the best known passages in the Bible. There are many others like it:

- “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).
- “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him, he will act” (Ps 37:5).
- “Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you. He will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps 55:22).

“Whenever a Christian prays, “Dear Father, thy will be done,” God replies from on high, “Yes, dear child, it shall indeed be done in spite of the devil and all the world.”

Martin Luther
Large Catechism, III:32, see also p.8.

(continued from page 1)

• “When he calls to me, I will answer. I will be with him in trouble, and I will rescue him” (Ps 91:15).

When Bible verses like those above are used simplistically, people are led to have false expectations of the Christian life.

Such verses need to be seen in the larger context of the main message of Scripture: the cross and resurrection.

The key is the cross. The first key passage about prayer is Romans 8:26-27:

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

We are weak. Like babbling infants, we jabber but lack the right words. Just as parents interpret the

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cries of their infant, so also the Holy Spirit takes our babbling and translates it into what it should be before the Father.

We know we are to pray: “Thy will be done.” But in our heart of hearts we mean “my will be done.” We want to harness his power for our purposes. We want to tell the Lord how to run the universe.

We “take everything to the Lord in prayer” but not in order to update God on the events and needs of our lives. As Luther taught, we pray because we are commanded to pray; it is a work (Large Catechism 3:4, *Book of Concord*, Tappert, p. 420.) We simply are to do it.

The **second** key passage is Romans 8:32:

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?”

All our prayers are in the context of the cross and resurrection, and not in some ideas or plans that we might have.

Through the cross and resurrection, his kingdom comes. As John 16:33b states: “In this world you have tribulation; but because of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

How God works. Like this:

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (I Cor 1:18, 21).”

Through the word of the cross his kingdom comes. He does it by himself, without our help or our hands. Our work in this world is to restrain evil, not bring in his kingdom.

Prayer gimmicks. Because prayer does not depend on us, we are free from gimmicks. *The Lutheran*, April 2009, has four articles offering tips and techniques for boosting the efficacy and satisfaction of prayer – as if you can make it right if you just try harder.

In short, *The Lutheran* articles are all about you and how you can make prayer real and make it happen. (Bad theology, bad advice.)

Presiding Bishop Hanson offers tips and techniques on prayer from his own experience (p. 54).

He writes about how he can at times open himself to God, and “yet there are times when I do not – cannot – pray. As Paul wrote, my sighs are too deep for words.”

The problem is that Paul did not write that. Two issues:

1. Hanson misquotes Paul: “**My sighs** are too deep....” Not Paul. Rather, Paul writes the Holy Spirit “intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

2. Hanson is confident that sometimes he can open himself to God while at other times he does not or cannot pray. In those times, the Holy Spirit covers for him. But the rest of the time Hanson can pray rightly on his own.

Paul, however, writes that all prayers – even our most earnest prayers – are broken, and the Holy Spirit **always** translates for us.

When we mistakenly think we can pray rightly, as Hanson does, we are caught in works-righteousness.

But because the Holy Spirit **always** translates for us, we do not need to get caught in gimmicks or false pride about prayer.

Comfort.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:25).

IN TRUST THEY TRUST

(ELCA TASK FORCE ON SEXUALITY)

1. In trust they trust. The premise of the ELCA's Task Force Report on sexuality is that sexual relations should be judged primarily on their **quality** rather than their **kind**. The quality the ELCA prizes most is trust.

By focusing on quality rather than kind, the ELCA is able to approve gay sex under the pious cloak of affirming the virtue of trust.

The problem is obvious: Incest, polygamy, and the like also may exhibit trust. An uncle-niece marriage may have trust. Polygamous unions may have trust. Making "trust" key doesn't work.

The ELCA is for **monogamous** gay unions, but why are twosomes acceptable but threesomes or foursomes are not? Where's the logic?

In traditional marriage, monogamy was originally tied to procreation – to the recognition that only two people, no more and no fewer, can conceive children.

The logic of monogamy is lost when gender no longer matters.

For example, lesbians can only "make" a child with the help of a "donor" male. A third "consenting adult" is in the shadows.

If marriage is to be broadened to approve same-sex "families," why not multi-partner and polygamous families, too?

Today there is an obvious constituency for polygamy – Muslims. In 2008 in Canada thousands of polygamous men received welfare benefits for each of their wives.

African Christians are trying to eradicate polygamy. Is their battle to keep marriage as one man and one woman conservative? Or progressive?

On every continent there are many more takers for polygamy than there will ever be for gay marriage.

The ELCA says that **gender** no longer matters; so why should the **number** of partners in a union matter? The ELCA avoids this obvious issue.

2. An opaque "complexity." A second ELCA mantra is that sexual life is "difficult, **complex**, and ambiguous" (105). More examples: "[Sexual] powers are **complex** and ambiguous" (350), "sexual love – the **complex** interplay of longing..." (367), "the **complexity** of human and societal forces" (387), "the **complexity** of such situations" (390) (emphasis added).

Calling sex "complex" obscures what is simple: the many harmful consequences to children when they are denied what is in their best interest – a home with a mother and a father and where there is a low level of conflict.

It's as if ELCA eyes are clouded by cataracts. They do not want to look at the damages. As T.S. Eliot wrote:

"Half the harm that is done in the world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't want to do harm – but the harm does not interest them ... or they do not see it ... because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves."

When a religion loses sight of what evil is, it's no longer a religion, it's a bowling league.

Robert Ferrigno

Robert Ferrigno's novels, *Prayers for the Assassin* and *Sins of the Assassin*, take place in the 2040's when most of what is now the United States has become an Islamic Republic.

What led most of Ferrigno's America to Islamize? A nuclear bomb in 2015 which destroyed New York

and Washington was a factor but not enough by itself to promote massive conversion to Islam.

In the words of an historian quoted in *Sins*: "Western churches, rather than offering moral guidance, were weak and vacillating, unwilling to condemn even the most immoral behavior."

3. Top-down, total tolerance. The third ELCA mantra is that there is "a **conscience-bound** lack of consensus in this church" (452). Lutherans on both sides ought to respect "the **bound conscience** of those with whom they disagree" (371).

In short, the time for talking is finally over. The battle is won. The August 2009 Churchwide Assembly will surely adopt the Church Council's recommendations to approve GLBT clergy and bless same-sex unions.

ELCA leaders are worried, nevertheless, that a few synods might vote to ban GLBT clergy and blessings.

Therefore the Church Council's fourth recommendation makes it clear that even if a synod votes to ban GLBT clergy and blessings, such a vote will have **no legal force** to restrict congregations in that synod.

The ELCA is a top-down church, and what the top wants is total tolerance for GLBT clergy and families.

FROM ONE EXTREME . . .

LC-MS: *THE LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE*

LC-MS: Stuck on inerrancy —

“Jesus attributed these books to Moses” (p.14).

“Luther titled them ‘the Books of Moses’” (p. 14).

“Conservative biblical scholars have always attributed these five books to Moses” (p. 14).

To be sure:

“The Bible itself clearly teaches that Moses used other sources – written and oral – for composing the first five books of Scripture. Moses’ most important source was God Himself; God dictated portions of the books to him” (cf Ex 24:3) (p. 14).

At the same time:

“A few passages possibly indicate later editing to provide clarity” (p. 15).

“Joshua, Moses’ assistant, or others may have helped Moses in organizing, writing, and compiling this broad variety of materials” (p. 15).

Nevertheless:

“The Holy Spirit blessed, guided, and directed the ‘research’ of Moses just as surely as He guided the writers of the New Testament” (p.15).

How this is shown in a specific case:

“The notes for Genesis are written from the perspective that Moses accurately described the events of creation based on God’s revelations to him. (p. 18).

“The first cycle of time, initiated by the distinction of light from darkness, first, “one.” Moses used the cardinal number here instead of the ordinal form “first”: his time-related words make it quite clear that we are to understand this day 1 as a normal 24-hour day, bounded by an evening and a morning (notes to 1:5) (pp. 19-20).

Spinning Luther. The LC-MS selectively quotes Luther to make it seem that he, too, was an inerrantist.

“We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively” (LW 1:5) (p. 16).

“These, then, are all historical facts. This is something to which I carefully call attention, lest the unwary reader be led astray by the authority of the fathers, who give up the idea that this is history and look for allegories” (LW 1:93) (p.22).

But Luther clearly was no inerrantist. For him the Bible’s authority is established by its power to convict of sin and convince of grace through the preaching of Christ, as Luther writes:

“All the genuine sacred books agree on this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Rom 3) and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Cor 2). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul taught it” (LW 35:396).

Inerrancy is the tie that blinds. In contrast, for the LC-MS the message of the Bible is authoritative first and foremost because “the book” is “supernatural.” Faith, though ultimately directed to Christ, is first directed to and dependent upon the Bible as the inerrant, written word of God.

In 1973 at its New Orleans convention the LC-MS adopted *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, which affirms:

- “that God is the true Author of every word of Scripture” (2).
- Further, “the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible” (3).
- “The Holy Scriptures . . . contain no errors or contradictions but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth.” (5).

A quasi-confessional document. In 1971 at its Milwaukee convention the LC-MS had already determined that “such doctrinal formulations are subordinate to the Lutheran Confessions,” but “such statements, together with all other formulations of doctrine, derive their authority from the Word of God.”

Therefore in 1973 the LC-MS declared: “**A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, in all its parts, to be Scriptural and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions, and therefore a formulation which derives its authority from the Word of God and which expresses the Synod’s position on current doctrinal issues**” (11).

Texts cited above:

The Lutheran Study Bible, Concordia, October 2009.
Portions available online at cph.org/lutheranbible.
A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, available at: www.lcms.org/president/aboutlcms/astatement.asp.

... TO THE OTHER

ELCA: ___ *LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE*

ELCA: Salvation without faith in Christ —

(Emphasis added in excerpts below.)

Matt 5:3-12

“The Beatitudes create what they declare. Jesus makes the new world of God’s rule actual now in this broken world. Yet it also remains a promised future. **Notice that they do not depend on faith or even on knowing Jesus. This is one way God creates salvation.**”

Matt: 25:31-46

“The parable speaks of a surprising way the unbelieving nations have a relationship to Jesus. Jesus’ word is a promise that creates what it declares. Jesus makes these little ones, who suffer and are broken, the place of his presence in our world, **even for those who do not believe in him or know about it. This is one way Jesus creates salvation for those who do not even know him.**”

Matt: 28:16-20

“The eleven disciples went to Galilee . . . Jesus now sends the disciples to make disciples of all nations. That does not mean make everyone disciples. Most people who are helped by Jesus and believe in him never become disciples. **Jesus includes in salvation people who do not believe in him or ever know about him (5:3-10; 25:31-45).**”

Dr. Duane Priebe (Wartburg Seminary) wrote the commentary on Matthew for the *Lutheran Study Bible*, a team project within the ELCA’s official *Opening the Book of Faith* (OBOF) study process, with oversight provided by a Board of Consultants (James Aageson, Norma Cook Everist, Diane Jacobson, Rolf Jacobson, Mark Allan Powell, Barbara Rossing, Nelson Strobert, Jane Strohl, and Timothy Wengert).

The idea that salvation does not require faith in Christ and/or that everyone is saved is becoming acceptable in the ELCA. In an interview before he died, Dr. Walter Bouman (Trinity Seminary) said: “Difficult as it is – because I always think of it as unfair – I’ve come to accept God’s **universal salvation** as the final consequence of Jesus’ resurrection” (*The Lutheran*, Nov 05, p. 24, emphasis added).

The Lutheran has never fielded a formal response to Bouman.

Different strokes for different folks. The major theme of the OBOF study process is that many, even contradictory, views of salvation are acceptable.

Dr. Stan Olson, a PhD in New Testament, former bishop of Southwestern Minnesota, now head of the ELCA’s Vocation and Education Unit, writes in OBOF (emphasis added):

[W]hen an interpreter or group implies that their particular understanding must be correct . . . [they show] **disrespect for the faithfulness of others’ efforts at hearing** (p. 14).

. . . [I]nsights are always tested by discernment within the larger Christian community, including **the community that stretches back across the centuries and around the globe** (p. 15).

The Bible is the fixed point given to us. It is the norm. Our commitment to this authority leads us to treat **any Christian disagreement as a conversation that remains open** . . . The Word interprets us, so we stand before it in hope, with our **varied interpretations** (p. 17).

Olson ought to know better. Every verse of the Bible has been in dispute over the centuries. It is a pious bait-and-switch game to claim that the Bible is “the norm” yet to warn not to “disrespect . . . the faithfulness of others’ efforts at hearing” and honor “varied interpretations.” If everyone is right, no one is right.

The OBOF Leader’s Guide even gives specific instructions that no one in a study group is to criticize anyone else. Finally what matters is whatever you think.

* * *

A plague on both your houses. The LC-MS has fallen into the ditch of inerrancy. The ELCA has fallen into the ditch of anonymous Christianity and universal salvation.

Conservative evangelicalism is no solution, either. It’s the same old lost cause of semi-Pelagianism (We have a yen for God; God gives us a kick-start, but we have to get going from there).

The way of salvation is the narrow way of the cross alone, very different from the biblicism of Missouri and the relativism of the ELCA.

Lutheran Study Bible, available through Augsburg Fortress, \$34.99 pb. 1/800/328-4648.

WORLD WATCH

LONDON

New Anglican Church in North America

Anglicans are like molasses. They talk about the middle; in fact, they muddle and brag about it. Nevertheless a real break has happened.

In April 2009 the GAFCON Primates (Archbishops of leading Churches in the Anglican Communion) voted to recognize the new Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). This vote brings together 28 dioceses, 700 churches, and 100,000 members. This new Province marks a huge and irrevocable split between traditional and liberal Anglicans in North America.

CYBERSPACE

10 Deadly Trappings of Evangelism

#8 from evangelical Joe Carter's list:

"8. Last week one of my fellow coworkers was asked to open our meeting with a prayer. Without hesitation he began reciting the Lord's Prayer. Afterward I joked that, having come up with such a fine prayer, he might want to write it down for future use. What I didn't say was how his recitation of the prayer made me uncomfortable.

First, I'm not used to hearing prayers that don't contain the word "just" (as in "We just want to thank you, Lord") so it had an odd ring to it.

Second, it seemed to violate the accepted standards for public prayer. I had always assumed that praying in public required being able to interlace some just-want-to's in with some Lord-thank-you-for's and be-with-us-as-we's in a coherent fashion before topping it all with an amen.

Third, I thought that prayers are supposed to be spontaneous – from the heart, off the top of the head – emanations, rather than prepackaged recitations. If it ain't original, it ain't prayer, right? Can I get an amen?

But where did this idea come from? We have entire books to teach us how to pray yet Jesus managed to wrap up the lesson in less than forty words. Why isn't that prayer good enough for evangelicals to use? Why do our prayers sound nothing like his example? "

(www.evangelicaloutpost.com)

JEDDAH

Islamic states for Sharia law

A block of the world's Islamic states, which have slowly been undermining the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, is now establishing its own "independent human rights commission."

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the 57-nation block of Muslim nations at the U.N., met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss its plan.

The OIC wants human rights to be under Sharia, which strictly limits the rights of women, religious minorities, and converts from Islam to other faiths.

The OIC has for the last ten years sponsored a string of "defamation of religion" resolutions at the U.N. General Assembly. These resolutions would elevate Islam and its practices above criticism – protecting a religion, rather than its adherents, from "defamation."

BEAUFORT

A robbery in progress?

In Beaufort, South Carolina, a motorist passing by a dilapidated business mistook three people walking about with their hands raised in the air for victims of a robbery in progress.

With their hands held high in prayer, *Love House Ministries* pastor (Episcopal) and two lay members – all wearing business attire – were walking outside a run-down building they hope to turn into a homeless shelter.

The group was praying that God would deliver the building for their needs.

Five Beaufort County Sheriff's Office vehicles responded in just minutes after the call came into the dispatcher.

While there was no incident report, Beaufort County Sheriff's Office Cpl. Robin McIntosh confirmed the call came in from a passing motorist.

McIntosh said it was reported as an armed robbery. But the hands raised were actually in prayer, asking God for the building with curtains hanging out of the windows and abandoned vehicles littering the parking lot.

"It was such a beautiful day. I wanted to reach right up to God really out of gratitude for his creation," said one of the high-handed pray-ers. The other added it was a harmless, if exuberant expression.

CYBERSPACE

“Fill in the blank” practices

Excerpt from “Doctrine and Practice” by Todd Wilken, available at www.issuesetc.org:

“There are what I like to call “Fill-in-the-blank” practices. Every church has a few of these. A fill-in-the-blank practice is any practice (true or false) for which no doctrinal reason has been presented. Be it candles on the altar or the raising of hands in prayer – any practice that is unexplained and disconnected from doctrine invites people to make up their own explanation and their own doctrine. Are there three candles on the altar to signify the Trinity? What if there are five of them? Are raised hands a gesture of passive reception or are they Holy Spirit antennae?”

WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Gay” gene claim suddenly vanishes

A 2009 publication from the American Psychological Association includes an admission that there is no “gay” gene (www.worldnetdaily.com).

AUGSBURG

LWF hosts “scholars”

In March 2009 the LWF held a meeting in Augsburg, Germany, for 120 Lutheran “scholars” from 30 countries on the theme: “Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches: Transformative Perspectives and Practices for Today.”

The problem is that it was the same-old, same-old liberation theology under a new guise. Here are some titles of the presentations:

- “From deep ecology to deep incarnation and back again. “
- “The Bible through the eyes and ears of the marginalized: Implications for the Lutheran Communion.”
- “What God has created will not be lost: Constructing a more inclusive soteriology.”

And think of the enormous cost of hosting 120 people for a week – travel, lodging, and food. And for what? These “scholars” know nothing of Luther’s two kingdom theology, but they all know how to run the world.

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LUTHER ON PRAYER

•“The first thing to know is this: It is our duty to pray because God has commanded it. We were told in the Second Commandment, ‘You shall not take God’s name in vain.’ Thereby we are required to praise the holy name and pray or call upon it in every need” (Large Catechism III:5; *BC* 420, Tappert edition).

•“Asking in the name of Christ really means relying on Him in such a way that we are accepted and heard for His sake, not for our own sake. Those, however, who ask in their own name, presuming that God should hear them because they are reciting such holy prayers will get nothing but wrath and disfavor” (WA 17 I: 252).

•“[The Lord’s Prayer] is far superior to all others that we might ourselves devise” (LC III:23; *BC* 423).

•“Here it is true what the doctors say: The appetite is whetted by sharp seasoning. For there is no better teacher of prayer than need. But since we go about in security and, as it were, with our eyes tied shut, and do not feel the evils that are present, it is not surprising that we either do not pray at all or do so very languidly. This is indeed what happens to me: I feel that I never pray better than when I am in trouble. This is the sharp seasoning” (*LW* 19:173).

•“We by no means reject prayer but we do renounce the utterly useless howling and growling, as Christ himself rejects and forbids great wordiness” (LC III:33; *BC* 424).

•“All who pray, curse. For instance, when I say, ‘Hallowed be Thy name,’ I curse Erasmus and all who hold views contrary to the Word” (WA TR 3, No. 3028).



“As I told you before, Lord, in the nicest possible way, I’m counting on you to make me a better person.”

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