

Radical Lutheranism

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Lutheran Identity in America

For some time now, Lutherans both here and abroad have been suffering from what contemporary jargon calls an identity crisis. Lutherans do not seem to know anymore what they ought to be or to do. On the International scene this is demonstrated by persistent studies sponsored by The Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran World Ministries going back some twenty years or so. John Reumann chronicles and sums up this study under the rubric, "The Identity of the Church and its Service to the Whole Human Being." The big question precipitating the crisis is indicated by the title. It becomes most evident, no doubt, in connection with the mission of the church, particularly in the "third world." Is the church to be concerned now with proclamation or development? Individual salvation or social justice? Peace with God or peace among humans?¹ Lutherans seem to have a difficult time deciding which way to go.

The crisis in identity is in many ways intensified on the national scene.² For the most part Lutherans in America are just lately emerging from geographic, ethnic, and synodical isolation onto the broader American scene with ambitions towards "inclusivity." We used to be predominantly Germans, Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Finns, and a smattering of other northern European and Nordic folk, and it was probably more our geographic isolation and ethnicity that kept us together and determined our identity than our Lutheranism. Now that we are apparently about to launch out more into the mainstreams of American Christianity, the identity question is posed with heightened urgency. Who or what in this opulent religious cafeteria shall we be? Shall we be conservative, liberal, confessional, orthodox, charismatic, neo-pentecostal, fundamentalist, or "evangelical" (perhaps "fundagelical," as some-

one recently put it)? Shall we be sectarian or ecumenical; protestant or catholic; high, low, or in the middle? Lutherans are pulled in all these directions today. They seem to be looking for someone to sell out to.

Is “Lutheran” anything to be in America today? Chances are Americans don’t even know how to spell it. It usually comes out “Luthern” or something like that. In the “homeland” established Lutheranism was predominantly a folk religion, a quasi-political and ethnic reality, closely identified with national and social life. Take all that away and what is left? What is Lutheranism at rock bottom? Some of my colleagues like to say—and I have echoed the thought myself—that Lutheranism is a confessional movement within the Church catholic, or that its primary reason for being is that it has a dogmatic proposal to make to the church catholic³, or, as Tillich used to say, it advocates the “Protestant Principle” vis-a-vis a catholic substance.⁴ But what then is the core, the substance of Lutheranism? Can a “movement” or a “proposal” or a “principle” give identity to the long haul, not to say serve the human soul for daily bread? Other Christian denominations are recognizable at least by distinctive forms of polity or perhaps even what is today called types of spirituality. Lutherans dabble pragmatically in whatever forms and types seem to work best in a given context, but canonize none of them.

Who then are we? The new church proposes to call itself “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” But what would that mean? “Evangelical,” “Lutheran,” “in America?” The debates and suggestions floated in the Commission for a New Lutheran Church are themselves indicative of the identity crisis. Several people thought we should at last drop the adjective “Lutheran” and call ourselves “Evangelical Catholics.” Others thought we should probably drop both “Lutheran” and “Catholic” and just call ourselves “The Evangelical Community in Christ” or some other generic title. Some thought we should drop the adjective “Evangelical,” since it is misleading today and already redundant when put together with “Lutheran.” How can a Lutheran not be evangelical? But in the end we decided we are still Lutherans after all and Evangelical to boot! But what that means still seems to be

a matter for debate. Is retention of the name anything more than romantic nostalgia? Even the protracted and hesitant debate over a headquarters site indicates something of our uncertainty about who we think we are, or hope to become. We feared being identified with parochial interests and looked for a “world-class city.” But what business do we have to do there? The arguments seemed to assume that it would be good for us to be *affected by* such an environment; the question of whether we have anything to *effect* there was largely unanswered.

The most persistent and serious identity crisis is manifest at the grass-roots level. These Lutherans seem somewhat at a loss as to what to make of the American religious scene. For the most part they do have a sense of the importance of the *evangel* and seem more ready to support the outreach mission of the church than anything else. Perhaps basically conservative, they are often puzzled and confused by clergy and leadership which seem to be leading elsewhere—just where is not very clear. The incessant drive for “inclusivity” can give the impression that they have been abandoned, perhaps, for a more desirable clientele. Emerging from their ethnic past, they can be impressed by and drawn to those who can dress a cause or a human longing in appealingly religious trappings. They remember there was something vital they were supposed to be for, and thus they are tempted by those whose piety seems impressive and/or offers more solace. They are attracted by “American” religion: “fundagelicals,” charismatics, the Hal Lindseys, Falwells, Robert Schullers, etc., and sometimes even by high-liturgical Anglo-Catholicism. Is “Lutheran” any recognizable thing to be any more? Garrison Keillor says he can always get a laugh when he mentions Lutherans. Why? Is it something to be apologetic about?

In an article on Lutheran identity written some ten years ago, Martin Marty saw Lutheranism standing between two forces, “. . . both of them attractive and capable of overwhelming Lutheranism, permitting it to remain as a shell or husk or form, but not as a confessional witness or a promise.”⁵ Reformed neo-evangelicalism is one force, Marty wrote, and the most likely winner, because America is “genetically programmed to tilt toward” it, and Lutheran conservatives and even some moderates are attracted by it.

The other force, in Marty's view, is a "more natural kin," but less likely to prevail: it is "a kind of evangelical Catholicity."⁶ Today it seems obvious that both of these forces are powerfully at work dividing the Lutheran house.⁷ Marty's analysis still leaves us with the question, however: is one or the other overwhelming Lutheranism?

Without wishing unduly to complicate matters, I want to mention at least one more force today. One might call it decadent pietism. Lutherans who came to this country were for the most part pietists of one stamp or another. Under the pressure of American Arminianism, Personalism, psychologism, individualism, human potential movements, and what not, pietism simply becomes decadent. The old pietism thought it vital first of all "to get right with God" through the experience of grace in conversion. But now, since God is, in general, love and no longer wrathful with anyone, God more or less drops out of the picture as a serious factor with which to be contended. In decadent pietism, since God is "affirming" in general, the task is to "get right with oneself." The old pietism contended that conversion was to be manifest in a morally upright life of service. Decadent pietism seems to hold that the way of the Christian is to become "affirming" of others in their chosen life styles. Along with this there is very often a rather sanctimonious "third use of the law" piety centered mostly around current social causes and problems. No longer concerned with one's own sins, and certainly not the sins of those one is supposed to affirm, one shifts attention to the sins of those other entities (more or less anonymous) which inhibit the realization of our affirmed and affirming human potential. Generally, these are summed up under the rubric of "the establishment" or perhaps personified by those who happen to be in power.

Is it fair to call this a pietism? We need not quibble about the nomenclature. In any case one has only to visit contemporary churches and note the religious fervor and piety with which the view is promoted (especially among contemporary clergy, I fear) to get a sense of its power as a contending force in the battle for identity. Among Lutherans, the gospel is equated mostly with this general drive toward being permissive, affirmed, and affirming.

Ministers must become therapists, church gatherings must be therapeutic and supportive if they are to meet people's needs, and ministry must be "prophetic" and have a social payoff if it is to be at all relevant.

Theological Identity: Radical Lutheranism

One could continue discussing the problem of identity endlessly, since there are so many dimensions and aspects to interpret and haggle about. My purpose here, however, is not to belabor the problem but rather to propose a way towards a solution, to suggest a course for the future which is helpful, promising, and faithful to the tradition. My thesis is that Lutherans, to be true to their identity, yes, even to reclaim their identity, or rather be reclaimed by it, should become even more radical proponents of the tradition that gave them birth and has brought them thus far. The crisis in identity indicates the necessity for staking out some turf on the ecclesiastical map. What shall we be? Let us be radicals: not conservatives or liberals, fundagelicals or charismatics (or whatever other brand of something-less-than gospel entices), but radicals: radical preachers and practitioners of the gospel by justification by faith without the deeds of the law. We should pursue it to the radical depths already plumbed by St. Paul, especially in Romans and Galatians, when he saw that justification by faith without the deeds of the law really involves and announces the death of the old being and the calling forth of the new in hope. We stand at a crossroads. Either we must become more radical about the gospel, or we would be better off to forget it altogether.

We should realize first of all that what is at stake on the current scene is certainly not Lutheranism as such. Lutheranism has no particular claim or right to existence. Rather, what is at stake is the radical gospel, radical grace, the eschatological nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen as put in its most uncompromising and unconditional form by St. Paul. What is at stake is a mode of doing theology and a practice in church and society derived from that radical statement of the gospel. We need to take

stock of the fact that while such radical Paulinism is in itself open to both church and world (because it announces a Christ who is the end of the law, the end of all earthly particularities and hegemonies), it is, no doubt for that very reason, always homeless in this age, always suspect, always under attack, always pressured to compromise and sell its birthright for a mess of worldly pottage.

Lutheranism, we have said in the past, is not so much a denomination as a confessional movement with perhaps a proposal of dogma to make to the church catholic, a critical principle to apply over against a catholic substance. I wonder more and more of late whether such at once over-modest and pretentious estimates of self-identity will serve the radical nature of the gospel as Paul, for instance, saw it. Would Paul have been satisfied with such a description of his own mission? What is the catholic substance, after all? What if it turns out to be a fantastic universal synthesis between this age and the next which quietly ignores or disarms New Testament eschatology and absorbs it in its universal ecclesiology? What if all critical principles and proposals of dogma are benignly ordered somewhere in the hierarchy of truths and filed away in a Denzinger? Can there really be such a thing as a *catholic* church? Should not someone be asking whether it is not likely that the radical eschatology proclaimed especially by Paul will have to be pursued to the end of the age? Is what Lutherans have stood for a passing fancy?

I don't know that I am prepared to give full answers to all such questions yet, but I do want to pursue the proposition that Lutheranism *especially* in America might find its identity not by compromising with American religion but by becoming more radical about the gospel it has received. That is to say, Lutherans should become radicals, preachers of a gospel so radical that it puts the old to death and calls forth the new, and practitioners of the life that entails "for the time being."

We must realize there is not just external reason for our identity crisis but deep theological and, for want of a better word, existential reason. It lies simply in Lutheranism's fateful attachment to the Pauline gospel in a world whose entire reason for being is opposed to it. All who adopt such a stance will find themselves constantly

on the defensive not only before the world but especially before the religious enterprises, not to say the churches, of the world. Witness already Paul's own anguished and repeated defenses of his own apostolate against "those reputed to be something."

If we are to probe to the root, the *radix*, of our identity crisis, however, we must dig beneath even the world's general disapproval. Theological anthropology, the understanding of human existence itself before God, is perhaps the place where the crisis becomes most apparent. The fact is that the radical Pauline gospel of justification by faith without the deeds of the law calls for a fundamentally different anthropology and with it a different theological "system" (if there be such!) from that to which the world is *necessarily* committed. The radical gospel of justification by faith alone simply does not fit, cannot be accepted by, and will not work with an anthropology which sees the human being as a continuously existing subject possessing "free choice of will" over against God and/or other religious goals. The radical gospel is the *end* of that being and the beginning of a new being in faith and hope.

This is readily apparent in virtually all of Paul's writings (especially in Romans and Galatians) when he pursues the logic of justification by faith alone to its end. The law does not end sin, does not make new beings, it only makes matters worse. Where the old continuity is maintained, sin does not end. No matter how much religious pressure is applied, sin only grows. But, Paul has the audacity to say where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more. But this is disaster for the old and its thinking. For then, it seems, the floodgates of iniquity are opened! Shall we not sin the more then, that grace may abound? Here we arrive at the crucial point. Here the pious old Adam can only recoil in horror from the thought of unconditional grace and try to protect the continuity of the old self by making compromises: some fateful mixture of grace and law, a little bit of human cooperation, perhaps the addition of a third use of the law, some heavy breathing about sanctification, and so on.

But the radical gospel will have none of that. Shall we sin the more that grace may abound? By no means! Why? *For you have died* and how can you who have died to sin still live in it? The

reason why abounding grace does not lead to sin lies in the fact that in its radicality it puts an end to the old, not in some species of compromise with the old. Furthermore, we miss the radicality of that if we do not see that this death is announced as *accomplished* fact: you *have* died. The death is not something yet to be done, one last act of spiritual suicide for “free choice.” If Jesus died for all, then all have died (2 Cor. 5:14). The being of the hearer is simply stamped with the *theologia crucis*, the death and resurrection of Jesus is done to us by the proclamation of the accomplished fact. There is no justification except by faith alone. The radical forgiveness itself puts the old to death and calls forth the new. It is simply not possible to work with an anthropology which assumes a continuity that survives the cross, and turns it into an object for free choice to dally with.

The continuing crisis for anyone who is grasped by that radical gospel comes both from the fact that the world and its church cannot do other than resist and attack that gospel (as a matter of self-defense), and from the fact that they cannot escape the constant temptation to make compromises which disguise or blunt the sharp edges of its radicality. Lutheranism in particular, and perhaps especially now in this country where it is losing its more “worldly” folk-trappings, finds itself in this crucible. Lutheranism was born because Martin Luther was grasped by the radical gospel. Doctrinally he prosecuted his case predominantly as an attack on the anthropology derived from and dependent on the belief in free choice of the will. An even cursory study of the genesis of his theology demonstrates this, from the very first disputations (*Against Scholastic Theology*, the *Heidelberg Disputation*), on through the radical attack on emerging humanistic anthropology in the *The Bondage of the Will*, to the final massive *Commentary on Genesis*. In basic anthropological presupposition there is no difference between scholasticism and modern humanism or, for that matter, various other brands of contemporary Christianity, be they catholic, evangelical, charismatic, or even Mormon.⁸ The differences among them on this score are more or less in-house disputes about how what is left of the continuously existing free choice can be cajoled, enticed, controlled, frightened, persuaded, impressed, etc., into

making “the right choice.” But in a pluralized society, the will is unable to make such a choice and can only lapse into a scepticism which has to settle for relativism. Whatever is right for you is the right choice.

In his debate with Erasmus, Luther saw that the attempt to combine the radical Pauline gospel with even the slightest hint of free choice could only lead to thoroughgoing scepticism, a permanent “identity crisis.”⁹ Hans-Joachim Iwand, a theologian little known in America because most of his work was published posthumously and remains untranslated, demonstrates this most clearly and consistently.¹⁰ The positing of free choice means that the subject stands over against the gospel as an object, a theory which is to be accepted on grounds dictated by the subject. But what could such grounds be? Can the subject will its own death? Willy-nilly, the subject, claiming to be free, constructs a defense mechanism against the gospel, and permanent scepticism is the outcome. One can avoid it, perhaps, only by submitting to the authority of an institution like that of the Roman Church. Freedom is given with one hand only to be taken back by the other! From this point of view the Enlightenment is simply a kind of institutionalization of scepticism over against ecclesiastical authoritarianism.

The tragedy of post-Reformation Lutheranism and the theological root of its identity crisis is to be found in the persistent attempt to combine the radical gospel of justification by faith alone with an anthropology which cannot tolerate it. Thus, as Iwand maintains, Lutheranism has for the most part been a house divided against itself. “The doctrine of justification was retained, but it was combined with an anthropology which had its entire pathos in a faith in the freedom of the will.” Thus, the radicality of the gospel was blunted and frittered away. The anthropology was borrowed largely from humanism. “. . . Humanism from Melanchthon to Ritschl indeed permits justification to occur even *sola fide*, but nevertheless breaks off the spearhead by which it would itself be mortally wounded, the bondage of the will.”¹¹ The attempt to combine two diametrically opposed theological positions can only issue in a fundamental scepticism in thought and hesitancy in practice.¹²

This is the source of what we might call the inner and outer aspects of Lutheranism's crisis. The attempt to combine two incompatible views means that internally it has always had to battle its fundamental scepticism, its uncertainty about the basis for its faith. So in its practice it has resorted mostly to a dogmatic absolutism largely dependent on a view of scriptural inerrancy, which usually brought with it disguised moral absolutisms of various sorts as well. A will which supposedly begins in a state of freedom ends in captivity. The message becomes a perverted mirror image of itself: "Yes, you are free, but you jolly well had better choose to believe in justification by faith alone or you will go to hell. The Bible says so! And then you had better show your thanks by your sanctification."

The outer side of the crisis comes from the fact that justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law can only appear dangerous, if not somewhat ridiculous, to the outside world premised on free choice of the will. Thus, Lutheranism easily becomes the target of religious disapproval, not to say ridicule. The litany of complaint is a familiar one: "How can there be serious evangelism if there is no free choice?" "Lutherans don't believe in good works." I have a Baptist friend who likes to say that the trouble with Lutherans is that they never get any better! "Lutherans preach cheap grace; Lutherans are quietists, Lutherans don't have any social ethics; Lutherans are too passive; etc." Many Lutherans themselves seem to make masochistic delight in rehearsing this litany. No doubt it is a way of getting back at justification by faith turned into dogmatic absolutism.

The division of the house against itself is thus quite evident. Lutheran theological ranks, especially in America, seem filled by practitioners who on the one hand are spooked by the ghosts of past absolutisms, dogmatic and moral, and on the other are somewhat embarrassed by Lutheranism's fateful attachment to the gospel of justification by faith alone and, of course, frightened to death of "exaggerated" assertions about the bondage of the will and such unpleasanties. So where then does one end? Somewhere in the middle, no doubt, in a theological no-man's land where one will be shot at from all sides. "Yes, justification is nice, but it's not the

only choice in the Biblical cafeteria.” A little criticism and relativism to counter the absolutism, a dash of “free grace” to relax the moralism (but not to be overdone), a little resorting to the Lutheran Confessions when in a tight spot (but not to be exaggerated), and a general tailoring of the message to “meet one’s needs.” The result is a loss of recognizable identity, a tendency to fade into the woodwork of generic religion, and an almost complete failure of nerve.

Proclaiming the Radical Gospel

What is to be done? Whither Lutheranism? The analysis leads to a crossroads. The radical gospel of justification by faith alone does not allow for a middle-of-the-road position. Either one must proclaim it as unconditionally as possible, or forget it. We must somehow muster up the nerve to preach the gospel in such fashion as to put the old to death and call forth the new. In one sense, of course, the litany of complaint against Lutheranism is all too true. Preaching the gospel of justification by faith alone *to* old beings in such fashion as to leave them old can only be a disaster. The proclamation either makes the old beings worse, or it puts an end to them to make them new. If Lutheranism is to recover a sense of its identity and mission today, it must begin to consider what it means to preach the gospel in radical fashion.

A short paper such as this is not the place to attempt laying out such a program. But in the space remaining I will venture some observations about the dimensions of the task. First of all, we do not adequately gauge the depth of the problem unless we see that is ultimately a problem for the *proclamation* (Word and Sacrament) of the church. Of course, theological reflection is vital. But one does not preach justification by faith alone or the bondage of the will and such doctrines. They are presuppositions for preaching. It is the *proclamation* that makes new beings, not theology, or even ethics. If we begin with the presupposition of bondage, it is obvious that the difficulty we face, as Iwand likes to insist, is not merely a logical or even a historical mistake.¹³ If it were so, it could simply be corrected theologically. The fact, as we have maintained all

along, that justification was combined with the wrong anthropology could be fixed simply by getting a new and improved dogmatic anthropology. But if the will is in fact bound, we must deal with what, for want of a better term, is an existential matter. To persist in the wrong anthropology is not just an exegetical or dogmatic mistake but a *temptation* about which the old being *per se* can do nothing, precisely because it wills to do nothing. And it wills to do nothing because it has no hope and no vision of the new. There is no freedom here; everyone theologizes as they must.¹⁴ Whatever talk there might be about a new anthropology based on death and resurrection, for instance, would only be turned into metaphor for moral improvement. The old remains bound.

What does this mean for theology? Is this a new and more vicious form of absolutism? The ramifications for theology and its task are indeed many, and we cannot tackle them here. The point, however, is not that a new absolutism is proposed, but that theology comes to realize precisely its limit and must give way to the sheer proclamation of grace. Theology does not make new beings. It is precisely the business of a theology which knows about bondage to see this, and thus to drive toward a proclamation in Word and Sacrament which by the power of the Spirit *ubi et quando visum est deo* will do it. When theology learns its task it will be relieved of its endless theoretical scepticism and can proceed with regained confidence. Such theology is neither absolutist nor relativist, conservative nor liberal. Theology drives to proclamation. Its thinking is dedicated to making that proclamation hearable in a given context as a radical gospel which sets free from bondage and makes all things new. Whither Lutheranism? Here we might find a way into the future worthy of the tradition which gave us birth.

Secondly, it follows from all we have said that the proclamation, to be radical, must be uncompromising, *sola gratia, sola fide*. The most common failing, the most persistent temptation, is a failure of nerve. A pastor said to me the other day after a lecture on absolution, "I think we know we are supposed to do the unconditional absolution, but I suspect we just don't dare!" Who has not experienced the fear of perhaps having gone too far this time in preaching the gospel, and perhaps has been afraid of having

wrecked the whole program of the church, so carefully built up! After all, for the time being we do stand in the old age; we see through a glass darkly. We walk, and talk, and prophesy by faith, by hope. But there is no middle ground in this matter. Certainly that was the burden of Luther's argument against Erasmus. If there is to be any point to the continued existence of Lutheranism (not to mention Protestantism in general), we must simply be ready to prosecute the case for this radicality.

Virtually all the failures and shortcomings of Lutheranism can be seen in the hesitancy to proclaim the gospel in uncompromising, unconditional fashion, to proclaim as though we were about the business of summoning the dead to life, calling new beings into existence. Most generally, it seems, the gospel is preached as though it were a repair job on old beings, a "new patch on an old garment." It is preached *to* old beings instead of *for* new beings. When that is the case, the litany of complaint turns out to be mostly true. Its understanding and proclamation of the gospel undercuts and enervates the moral projects of old beings and seems only to invite license. When the gospel is not "anti-old Adam/Eve" it just becomes antinomian. The only way one can rescue it from absolute disaster then is to make compromises with the projects of old beings. But that is the end of the gospel. Either the gospel must be preached in radical fashion, or it is best left alone altogether.¹⁵

A radical Lutheranism would be one which regains the courage and the nerve to preach the gospel unconditionally; simply let the bird of the Spirit fly! There is too much timidity, too much worry that the gospel is going to harm someone, too much of a tendency to buffer the message to bring it under control. It is essential to see that everything hangs in the balance here. Faith comes by hearing. Will the old persist? Will we understand ourselves to be continuously existing subjects called upon to exercise our evanescent modicum of free choice to carve out some sort of eternal destiny for ourselves? That depends. It depends on whether someone has the courage to announce to us, "You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God!" "Awake you who sleep, and arise from the dead!" It could be that we will be only continuously existing subjects doomed to our own choices. Is the law eternal? It could be

and will be if Christ is not preached so as to end it for us. We tremble on the brink of freedom. Is this all, this old age, this confusing mixture of *regnum mundi* and *regnum diaboli*? It could be. That is the terror of it. And it will be for us unless someone sounds the trumpet of the *regnum dei* with an absolutely uncompromising clarity. How shall they hear without a preacher? We have a hard time realizing that everything hangs here on the unconditional announcement, the absolutely new start of God in the resurrection of Jesus. The vision, the hope, yes, even the ecstasy or the “rapture” as even Luther could say,¹⁶ hang on the radical unconditionality of the proclamation.

Finally, it is only out of this radical unconditionality that an appropriate understanding of the life of the Christian for the time being can arise. We simply do not understand the pathos of the Reformer’s utterances about faith doing the good spontaneously and naturally unless we see this. Precisely because the declaration is unconditional we are turned around to go into the world of the neighbor to carry out our calling as Christians. The works of the Christian are to be done in the world, but not as conditions for salvation. The persistent and nagging debate about the two kingdoms among Lutherans arises mostly out of reluctance to be radical enough. Precisely because the gospel gives the Kingdom of God unconditionally to faith, this world opens up and is given back as the place to serve the other. Will it be so given? That depends, of course. It is not a static affair. To the degree that one is grasped and set free by the unconditional gospel, to that degree one can be turned from the sort of life created by the self (and its supposed free but actually bound will) to the world of the neighbor. To the degree that the theological use of the law comes to an end in Christ, to that degree a political use of the law for others becomes a possibility. If somehow this could be grasped, perhaps we could cease the silly debates about whether the church’s mission is proclamation *or* development, personal salvation *or* social justice, etc., and get on with the business of taking care of this world and the neighbor as lovingly, wisely, and pragmatically as our gifts enable.

Radical Lutheranism? Is there, and can there be such? That depends, of course. It depends, for our part, at least, on whether or

not we are “en-couraged” enough to preach that radical and unconditional gospel. Beyond that, of course, it depends on the Spirit. But after all, in spite of our reluctance and timidity, it isn’t some herculean task we are being asked to do. It has all been done. All we have to do is say it; just let the bird fly!

NOTES

1. See the introduction to John Reuman, ed., *The Church Emerging: A U.S. Lutheran Case Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 1–31. The entire book is an interesting testimony to the agonies of Lutheran identity today.

2. The prevalence of that word in the debates and documents of the newly forming Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is noteworthy. “Crisis” and “identity” appear quite often in current Lutheran self-scrutiny, both at home and abroad. Robert H. Fischer, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago observes that “For many reasons North American Lutheranism is confronted by an identity crisis. In its larger dimensions this is a crisis in understanding both our churchly mission in the world and our Lutheran identity within the Christian ecumenical scene.” *The Church Emerging*, p. 6. See also Martin E. Marty, “Scenarios for a Lutheran Future: A Case Study of Identity,” *Lutheran Forum*, 9 (May 1975): pp. 6–10.

3. Eric Gritsch and Robert Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 2ff.

4. See the essays in Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), especially p. 161ff.

5. Marty, pp. 8–9.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7. Marty remarks: “I think that the typical conservative Lutheran congregation today has not the faintest idea of how to sort out Francis Schaeffer or Anita Bryant, Billy Graham or Johnny Cash, Robert Schuller or Hal Lindsay from their own tradition. And some Lutheran moderates fall under the same sway.” *Ibid.*, p. 9. No doubt Marty is right. But one should also add that the typical “Evangelical Catholic” congregation or theologian today likewise has not the faintest idea of how to sort out the work of a Gregory Dix, Odo Casel, J. A. T. Robinson, Schillebeeckx or an Aidan Kavanagh, from their tradition.

8. Cf. “Lectures on Galatians (1535),” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press), v. 26, pp. 295–6. “Whoever falls from the doctrine of justification is ignorant of God and is an idolator. Therefore it is all the same whether he then returns to the Law or to the worship of idols; it is all the same whether he is called a monk or a Turk or a Jew or a Anabaptist.”

9. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957), p. 140.

10. See, for example, the collection of essays entitled *Um den rechten Glauben*, Theologische Bücherei, Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert. Bd. 9. Systematische Theologie (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959).

11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

12. Ibid., p. 9.
13. Ibid., pp. 17 and 18.
14. Ibid., p. 19.
15. Luther maintained that semi-Pelagianism was much worse than outright Pelagianism! *Bondage of the Will*, p. 292.
16. Ibid., p. 311.