



MAY 2018

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A Letter to the Vicar

To Vicar:

This newsletter draws its focus on you as you finish training for the taking of holy orders in our Lord's Church. To take orders, implies that pastors stand under some manner of authority. What authority, though, can truly bind one who knows the gospel of Christ and the freedom therein?

The Church finds herself hard pressed to keep order where there is found such freedom. Order, in a fallen world, is most typically maintained by the law. The Church, however, as an agent of the gospel, finds it problematic to allow the law dominance without messing up the proclamation of the new freedom from the law in Christ. No command of the law ought to be permitted to encroach upon or to do violence to the doctrine of justification. This means that the Church cannot wield the threat of punishment and hell as a cudgel in order to keep order. The Church cannot compel a man to do this or that thing for the sake of his salvation. To teach in this direction is to commit legalism.

If the Church cannot or should not employ the threat of hell as a cudgel to keep order, then she runs the risk that Christian liberty will be abused and even torn to shreds. Men who understand the freedom of the gospel may well abuse it.

How then does the Church keep order? One answer that the Bride of Christ has found is through the implementation of vows.

Our Lord himself has set for us an example of taking vows. He swears by himself. He utters promises and even delights to have his people hold him to these promises, as Moses did.

Our Lord's vow-taking is entirely of a gospel nature. He utters his promises so that we might be sure of his disposition and action. I am that I am is free and boundless, yet not found by us to be capricious and unpredictable, because He has bound himself by his own word.

For man, in his imitative action of vow-taking, the gospel motive abides. A husband makes vows to his bride, in part, so that she might know what it is that she can expect from him.

For man, as opposed to God, there is also, however, a law motive in the undertaking of vows. A man binds himself, in part, because he is conscious that he is simul justus et peccator. He binds the old man, who is a tricky dog. Man enters into such vows aware of the craftiness and guile of the old man, who will use the most sincere and pious pretenses—under the flag of Christian liberty—to void his vows or to reinterpret them. The prudent man will hold to his vows desperately, knowing that the devil, the world and flesh ever strive to take the old man captive; and that he is carried away not only by base lusts, but also by noble intentions.

I am reminded of a brilliant exchange from Robert Bolt's play, A Man For All Seasons, in which Thomas More's future son-in-law protested against More's inclination to grant the devil the benefit and protection of the law. He (More's future son-in-law) states that he would make a great road, cutting down every law in England to get to the devil. To this, More's character replies; "And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you—where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—man's laws, not God's—and if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil the benefit of the law, for my own safety's sake."

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Thomas More, of course, lived at the time of foment and reformation during the 16th century. Vows are one species of the man-made laws to which Bolt's More refers. Many of the reformers found themselves in much the same position as More's son-in-law, desiring to cut down certain laws—namely the vows they had taken as clerics in the Roman Church—which they regarded as obstacles to the gospel. No more noble cause; no more pious sentiment can be imagined for the dismantling of the law of a vow than the cause of the gospel. Yet, if the very vitality of vows were not to be clear-cut, leaving the land flat for the future and leaving the Church without any operative device for maintaining some order in a fallen world, then the vows that the reformers had formerly made needed to be loosed without tearing apart the veracity of vows altogether. They could not frivolously set aside those vows which they had taken. In article XXVII of the Confession and Apology, the reformers sought to judiciously extricate themselves from their vows.

Their methodology for extricating themselves was to annul the vows they took by finding them illegitimate. An illegitimate vow was to be regarded as no vow.

What constitutes an illegitimate vow? The reformers found several precipitating causes for which a vow might be deemed illegitimate. A vow taken at too early an age, they argued, made the vow illegitimate. An age of discretion was posited. Persons, the reformers further claimed, were often coerced to enter into vows against their will. Such a practice was regarded as inherently antithetical to the very nature of vows as a voluntarily entered arrangement by one whose will was free. Similarly, if the fundamental components or elements of a vow were misrepresented, then the vow could be deemed illegitimate. Because it had been taught that entering monastic orders merited justification before God, these vows were susceptible to being cut down.

Inasmuch as we accept these arguments, it behooves us to declaim clearly what a particular vow is about beforehand, to he who would undergo it; lest that vow later be thrown off as illegitimate. Therefore, it is important for one, such as you Vicar, who looks ahead to entering vows at ordination, to know clearly what your vows entail. To this end, the Agenda lays out this rite for your study and meditation.

One of the promises made by the ordinand regards subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. What remains less explicit, is the manner in which these beliefs will be practiced within the Church.

I contend that a component part of our orders, as pastors, is to follow the Church in the practice of her confessional theology as articulated in the rites and services of the Agenda and Hymnal. I would suggest that to depart from these rites is an act of bad faith; not unlike a man who wishes to remain married to his Lutheran wife, while he sleeps with the Baptist woman down the block. Would it not be incredible and unprecedented for one to swear on the rite found in the Agenda and subsequently jettison that same Agenda and its accompanying rites? If the Agenda is seen as merely one possibility, what is to keep the ordinator from inventing his own rite? What results but a gaggle of men under differing orders, pretending to walk together (under one health plan), while in reality they are each their own pope? Or would one suggest that the rite of ordination/installation is fixed, while all the rest of the Agenda is in flux? Are the rites contained in the Agenda individual pieces, or parts of a whole? Constellations orbiting around a single liturgical life of the Church?

In any case, arguing that the Hymnal and Agenda do possess some binding force is not subject to the criticism that this is legalism; unless someone can be found saying that the use of the hymnal merits justification before God. The binding force of the rites of the Church are component parts of voluntarily entered and, we hope, legitimate vows.

If the individual conscience determines that his vow was illegitimate and wishes to extricate himself therefrom, let him do so. But let him not pretend to be still bound, while not subjecting himself to the vow's component parts. The reformers extricated themselves from their monastic vows and often married afterwards. They did not, however, continue to set up house with their wives in the monastery, acting as though their former vows were fully intact.

I contend that it is bad faith (as well as foolish arrogance) for a pastor to take upon himself the enormous responsibility of altering the rites of the Church. In so doing, he tears Christian liberty to shreds. The old man succumbs too easily to arguments grounded on noble sentiment and holy designs. That pastor, who lets the old man in him be convinced that to pursue the devil he might cut down any or every law, will find himself exposed to a counterattack without a stick to hide behind. When a pastor acts on the presupposition that every form is subject to the whim of the pope/enthusiast in the office, who always knows best how to articulate the Church's theology at a given moment; what is left to keep order? He has dismantled everything. He has cut down all the trees to get after the devil, and now the devil has a straight shot at him.

I need all of my vows; in every aspect of my life—for apart from them, I expose myself to the tactics and temptation of the devil, world and flesh. I do not permit myself the freedom to reinterpret the meaning of my vows. He who cannot be bound solely by the gospel and for the gospel (as the old man cannot be) must be bound by the law.

The law of the vow is beneficially operative in the life of the man who sees the beast in his own breast and respects the danger he constantly courts within the world.

So—Vicar—consider carefully the substance of your vow; and when the time comes, allow them to bind you for your own defense and comfort.

In Christ,
Pastor Peck

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ASCENSION – Thursday, May 10th



The reality of Christ's Ascension is so important that all three Creeds confess that "He ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." The denial of the Ascension is as grave a departure from Christian teaching as is denial of Christ's Resurrection.

Christ's bodily Ascension foreshadows our own entrance into Heaven not simply as souls, after our death, but as glorified bodies, after the resurrection of the dead at the Final Judgment. In redeeming mankind, Christ not only offered salvation to our souls but began the restoration of the material world itself to the glory that God intended before Adam's fall. Without the Ascension of Christ, His work would not be complete.

Therefore, we will observe the Feast of the Ascension on **Ascension Evening, Thursday, May 10. The service with Holy Communion will begin at 6:30 pm.** Come and be in the presence of the ascended Christ.

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STEWARDSHIP TODAY: Nothing inspires human generosity more than having the generosity of God in full view. God's people will be generous when the Lord's Word is lavished on them. Like Israel of old, God's mercy is ever before His people. At the font, on the altar, and from the pulpit God's generosity washes over His people. His generosity inspires the generosity of His people.

(from StewardCAST-LCMS)

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:11)


Serve the Lord with Gladness...Psalm 100:2
Welcome to all women of the congregation
Lutheran Women in Mission
“BOLD IN CHRIST”
“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold”
2 Corinthians 3:12



Please support our Wheat Ridge LWML Members who will be attending the District LWML Convention in Boulder June 8 - 10.

Be a Missionary with Your Mite Box!

Completed payment of \$10,000 for Project Pastoral Education in West Africa

We remember this month our grant for Project Pastoral Education, West Africa (PPEWA.) This mission sends two or three of our LCMS pastors to men in Sierra Leone who are already pastors, but seeking to advance their knowledge of the Bible. Not only that, but the goal is for them to open a seminary in their own country, enabling them to teach their own pastors and become independent in that way. These pastors from the states are taking to heart the words of Paul in 2Timothy 2:1,2—*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*



MITE SUNDAY IS MAY 13

Our Mites will be helping to fund the Lutheran World Relief Quilt and Kit Shipping Fund.

LWML Meeting
Saturday, May 12 at 9:00 am
Election of officers - Library Workday
All women are welcome!

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BLESSED IS THE MOTHER.....

The celebration of Mother's Day is usually credited to Anna Jarvis who, in 1906, began to remember other mothers on the anniversary of her own mother's death.

But Mother's Day was first celebrated in Boston in 1872. It was organized by Julia Ward Howe, a poet, reformer, scholar, mother of six children, author of the words to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic", and founder of the Women's Peace Conference in 1870.

At the time of the Franco-Prussian war, she wrote, "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters, to prevent the waste of human life of which they alone bear and know the cost? The august dignity of motherhood and its terrible responsibility now appeared to me in a new aspect."

She began to promote Mother's Day in 1872 as a festival for the advocacy of peace. It was so celebrated in the U.S. and abroad for many years, but gradually lost ground to the Jarvis celebration.

*Remember Mother's Day -
May 13!*

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FAREWELL LUNCHEON

COME ONE - COME ALL

On Sunday, May 20th LWML will host a Farewell Luncheon for Vicar, Natanya, and Annaliese Folks after the church service. Everyone is invited to attend and join in the celebration for the Folks, and send them on their way back to the Seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN for Vicar to complete his studies. Please sign up in the Narthex so LWML ladies know how many will be joining us.

