

Trinity Te Deum

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Ever learning....but

You know when someone says something and then says “but” that he is about to modify, and usually in a bad way, what he has just said. You would think “ever learning” has got to be a good thing. Not so says St. Paul in 2 Timothy 3:7. He speaks of those “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”

Luther too regularly railed against those who knew no more of the Faith at the end of the year than they did at the beginning and at those who having read the Catechism through once thought they had mastered it. He spoke of how even though he had written it, he still read and prayed it regularly. How about us?

I think the Synod’s devotion book *Portals of Prayer* has done a lot to inculcate people with a one and done mentality. It’s a different devotion for every single day of the year. I admit that the devotions are far better now than they were 30 years ago where virtually everyone ended with what you were supposed to do. However, a different devotion every day doesn’t inculcate anything but change. When people comment about a good devotion in this resource it’s always about some funny, different, or new fact they learned.

It wasn’t always this way. Before *Portals of Prayer* began publishing 75 years ago the Synod’s publishing house produced *The Family Altar*. It was book of devotions to be used

year after year. This is how you learn things: going over good information again and again. The men in Athens are not being praised when Scripture says they delighted in nothing but hearing something “new” (Acts 17:21).

Once again, as I have for the past 14 years, I am offering you excerpts from my devotion book *Me and My Arrows*. They are not changed, updated, modified, or redid. If you have used these for the last 14 years, you have learned much more than those who have used *Portals of Prayer*. They would have read 560 different devotions; you would have read about 40.

If you prefer to use *Portals of Prayer*, go right ahead. The church purchases them for you to use. Only about half of them are ever taken. I am not on the warpath against *Portals of Prayer* but against the falsehood that believes it can only learn, or even learn better, if the information comes in a new form with new stories. This attitude is inconsistent with liturgical worship and catechetical education.

Ever learning only comes to the knowledge of the truth if the truth is what you are ever learning. Ever learning cute or interesting stories is fun but it doesn’t arrive at knowledge of the truth but of more stories.

City of Houston demands pastors turn over sermons

By Todd Starnes

Published October 14, 2014
FoxNews.com

The city of Houston has issued subpoenas demanding a group of pastors turn over any sermons dealing with homosexuality, gender identity or Annise Parker, the city’s first openly lesbian mayor. And those ministers who fail to comply could be held in contempt of court.

“The city’s subpoena of sermons and other pastoral communications is both needless and unprecedented,” Alliance Defending Freedom attorney Christina Holcomb said in a statement. “The city council and its attorneys are engaging in an inquisition designed to stifle any critique of its actions.”

ADF, a nationally-known law firm specializing in religious liberty cases, is representing five Houston pastors. They filed a motion in Harris County court to stop the subpoenas arguing they are “overbroad, unduly burdensome, harassing, and vexatious.” “Political and social commentary is not a crime,” Holcomb said. “It is protected by the First Amendment.”

The subpoenas are just the latest twist in an ongoing saga over the Houston’s new non-discrimination ordinance. The law, among other things, would allow men to use the ladies room and vice versa. The city council approved the law in June.

The Houston Chronicle reported opponents of the ordinance launched a petition drive that generated more than 50,000

signatures – far more than the 17,269 needed to put a referendum on the ballot. However, the city threw out the petition in August over alleged irregularities.

After opponents of the bathroom bill filed a lawsuit the city's attorneys responded by issuing the subpoenas against the pastors.

The pastors were not part of the lawsuit. However, they were part of a coalition of some 400 Houston-area churches that opposed the ordinance. The churches represent a number of faith groups – from Southern Baptist to non-denominational.

“City council members are supposed to be public servants, not ‘Big Brother’ overlords who will tolerate no dissent or challenge,” said ADF attorney Erik Stanley. “This is designed to intimidate pastors.”

Mayor Parker will not explain why she wants to inspect the sermons. I contacted City Hall for a comment and received a terse reply from the mayor's director of communications. “We don't comment on litigation,” said Janice Evans.

However, ADF attorney Stanley suspects the mayor wants to publicly shame the ministers. He said he anticipates they will hold up their sermons for public scrutiny. In other words – the city is rummaging for evidence to “out” the pastors as anti-gay bigots.

Among those slapped with a subpoena is Steve Riggle, the senior pastor of Grace Community Church. He was ordered to produce all speeches and sermons related to Mayor Annise Parker, homosexuality and gender identity. The mega-church pastor was also ordered to hand over “all communications with members of your congregation” regarding the non-discrimination law. “This

is an attempt to chill pastors from speaking to the cultural issues of the day,” Riggle told me. “The mayor would like to silence our voice. She's a bully.”

Rev. Dave Welch, executive director of the Texas Pastor Council, also received a subpoena. He said he will not be intimidated by the mayor. “We're not afraid of this bully,” he said. “We're not intimidated at all.” He accused the city of violating the law with the subpoenas and vowed to stand firm in the faith. “We are not going to yield our First Amendment rights,” Welch told me. “This is absolutely a complete abuse of authority.”

Tony Perkins, the head of the Family Research Council, said pastors around the nation should rally around the Houston ministers. “The state is breaching the wall of separation between church and state,” Perkins told me. “Pastors need to step forward and challenge this across the country. I'd like to see literally thousands of pastors after they read this story begin to challenge government authorities – to dare them to come into their churches and demand their sermons.” Perkins called the actions by Houston's mayor “obscene” and said they “should not be tolerated.” “This is a shot across the bow of the church,” he said. This is the moment I wrote about in my book, “God Less America.” I predicted that the government would one day try to silence American pastors. I warned that under the guise of “tolerance and diversity” elected officials would attempt to deconstruct religious liberty. Sadly, that day arrived sooner than even I expected.

Tony Perkins is absolutely right. Now is the time for pastors and people of faith to take a stand. We must rise up and reject

this despicable strong-arm attack on religious liberty. We cannot allow ministers to be intimidated by government thugs.

The pastors I spoke to tell me they will not comply with the subpoena – putting them at risk for a “fine or confinement, or both.” Heaven forbid that should happen. But if it does, Christians across America should be willing to descend en masse upon Houston and join these brave men of God behind bars.

Pastor Welch compared the culture war skirmish to the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto, fought in present-day Harris County, Texas. It was a decisive battle of the Texas Revolution. “This is the San Jacinto moment for traditional family,” Welch told me. “This is the place where we stop the LGBT assault on the freedom to practice our faith.”

We can no longer remain silent. We must stand together - because one day – the government might come for your pastor.

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Marriage in a Godless Culture

West Point Circuit Presentation

October 26, 2014

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At this summer's Cuming County Fair the main music entertainment was a young lady named Jana Kramer. This former TV actress, turned country music singer, will help us see where marriage is at today. Here are some of the words to her song “love:” “LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!!\ But love love love\ I still believe in you!\ I still believe in miracles\ I still

believe in wedding rings and bibles\ I still believe the best walk you'll ever take is\ Walking down the aisle” This illustrates the main problem with marriage today. It might not seem like it, but Jana's personal history explains a lot. “Her first husband was Michael Gambino in 2004, but they got a divorce within few months.” At 20 years old, she married but did not stay married long, about 5 months. Then love found her again, when she was 27 years old. She got engaged to a fellow actor [Jonathan Schaech]. She told the media, “It was the happiest moment of my life.” They also got married but their marriage only lasted a month. That happiest moment was just a moment. Love seemed to have left her and they divorced.

But she really does believe in love, weddings, and bibles, remember. She met another country artist, Brantley Gilbert, last year. “Twenty nine-year-old Kramer and 28-year-old Gilbert confirmed they were dating last September. They were engaged in January, the same month that Kramer confirmed they were living together.” So they had a play marriage and starting planning her third marriage.

Listen to the words again. What is she really saying? “LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!! But love love love I still believe in you.” Marriage as an institution is thought very little of in this song. But love is worshipped;^a it is more than an emotion. It is a sort of divine energy. She believes *in* love, the same way we are called to believe *in* Jesus Christ.

I do not say this to make fun of Jana. We know of people in our community, church, and family who have behaved in a

similar fashion. People divorce for trivial reasons and live together without a commitment. People marry and divorce for an idea of love.

The acceptance of homo-sexuality today is a problem. But the view of marriage itself is the bigger problem. A homo-sexual union is a contradiction, because two of the same sex cannot unite physically. But most hetero-sexual unions are seen just like the homosexual union^a an association of two individuals, held together only by their emotion and love. In other words, God has nothing to do with marriage, even for many Christians. We think of marriage as a human work.

And if marriage is determined by the people in it, not society, civil laws, or God Himself, then a loveless marriage is immoral. You have heard this or thought this: people who are miserable in a marriage have a “bad marriage.” Then divorce is the answer, because the marriage is the problem. But marriage is God's work. The definition in Genesis was repeated by Jesus: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

God joins in marriage^a He unites the two. What else did Jesus say? “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:6). To break a marriage is to break God's own work. Only the Lord has the authority to break marriage;^j in death. When man breaks it, it is a sin against God. Even though we think we choose our future spouse, marriage is entirely God's work. We agree to enter the estate of matrimony. But once in it, it is bigger than us

or how we feel. Marriage is an institution of God, not a private matter. But since the government doesn't really regulate marriage, it is up to the two individuals. Society and sometimes even the Church has no say in marriage or divorce. People find it offensive to speak against sexual sins of this nature. These are huge problems: Living together, divorce, practicing homo-sexuality, pre-marital sex, and pornography.

In our world, these are considered private affairs^a nobody else's business. Americans believe in love and the right of sexual pleasure and that no one should have to stay a loveless marriage.

Fake and True Love

The truth is, if you have fallen for someone and don't want to fall out of love, there is one quick solution: marry them. Passion alone cannot last under the weight of a lifetime commitment and practical concerns. Marriage is very down-to-earth. It involves sharing a bed with someone who snores and gets sick. Unlike when dating, a spouse doesn't wake up with nice hair and sweet breath. Marriage is about living by the sweat of your brow to eat in a sinful world. It is about bills and children, food and a home, sharing and compromising. It is about not getting what you want. It does not lead to romance or a permanent emotional high. Instead, it is a school for life that demands a lot, but forces you to be a more mature, less selfish person.

Marriage is hard. Think of when a married couple has a big anniversary, such as 50 years. Do we ask if each day was full of love and happiness? No, the

miracle is that two sinners haven't killed each other. We celebrate that they continue to *try* to love each other, even when the emotion of puppy love left decades ago. Love, as an action, is hard. But in the wedding vows, we promise "to love," not to be "in love." The difference is night and day.

You may think I'm joking about killing each other, but I'm not. 40% of female murders are by a romantic partner.¹ The same intense emotion of love that causes people to get married, causes them to commit adultery, divorce, and murder. One fascinating book is called "Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage." That is exactly what happened. The idea of marriage as God's work and a public institution that served the society started going downhill about 300 years ago. Consider this: if love is the driving engine of a relationship, then they must be equals. Love between a superior and subordinate is not pleasant or fair. Duties or fixed roles conflict with free and equal romance. And children do not help marriage, is the common advice. They supposedly kill romance and the intense feeling of love;^a despite the fact that children and marriage go together. The ideal marriage is between two equals who do not have distinct gender roles. But the Bible speaks of the wife submitting as the weaker partner and the man leading as the head.

¹ Elizabeth Flock, "WHO Study: Forty Percent of Murdered Women Killed By Their Partners" (June 21, 2013), <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/06/21/who-study-forty-percent-of-murdered-women-killed-by-their-partners>.

Who is the ideal soulmate? Notice that this term "soulmate" does not refer to the body, anatomy, or gender. In homosexual "marriage," two of the same sex are equal, children are impossible to conceive, and there are no roles to play. They get to be two separated, equal individuals^a connected only by feelings. "LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!!\ But love love\ I still believe in you!" Love has conquered marriage in our minds.

But human love is an illusion. We are selfish from the moment of birth. In fact, there is no true love without God and knowledge of Jesus. In I John 4 we read: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." True love is sacrificial. It is giving of yourself and your life, even to death. Having children teaches us a bit of what love is;^a it is not about how we feel. We do not always have an emotional high from being around our children. True love requires suffering and pain. Only Jesus has loved us like this^a no sinner can possibly put up with constant rebellion and unfaithfulness. Marriage is not the way to get this love. Only in the Gospel,

which we hear and believe, do we get God's love. We are freed from sins, even the sexual misconduct of our youth. Christ nailed our sins to the cross and put them to death. Now you are in God the Father's good graces, with no guilt or punishment on you. You have God's love shown in Jesus who was your sin offering.

Why Marry

If you don't marry for love, why do it? Because you have to. Marriage is an unavoidable fact of this world. Americans actually think too much of marriage, not too little. It is a practical fact of life, un-avoidable for most. It is like breathing oxygen. You may not like the idea and can try to resist it, but God pushes us to it. He works in a hidden way to cause us to desire it.

Marriage is about the body, not the soul. We were created with an attraction to the opposite sex. It can be ignored or denied, but lust is very powerful. Our bodies demand to be with another and share a life together. This is actually God's work. Not to save us, but it is His natural working in creation.

God said to Adam and Eve, and again to Noah, "Be fruitful and multiply." This is not a command, married couples don't have to think about children to have them. No, God the Father implanted this desire and necessity of having children. This (plus our sin) is why the young lust and cannot control their desire. Hear Martin Luther speak about it: "For this word which God speaks, "Be fruitful and multiply," is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*werck*] which is not our prerogative to hinder or

ignore. Rather, it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or woman but created them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so they have to multiply. And wherever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice. For the Word of God which created you and said, "Be fruitful and multiply," abides and rules within you; you can by no means ignore it, or you will be bound to commit heinous sins without end."²

Luther speaks utterly realistically. We are not all royal couples. We are not all supermodels with perfect bodies and massive sex appeal. But almost all have the divine impulse to know someone else^a to join as one flesh.

St. Paul in I Cor. 7 speaks of marriage in the most practical way possible^a just like Luther did later. "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Marriage is a concession, not a source of fulfillment for the Christian. Sinful men and wo-

men are weak and almost all will fall into sexual immorality. Doesn't it seem like single women today have more children than the married ones? Isn't living together practically just like marriage (though without the public commitment)? Marriage, and its most basic sexual act, are unavoidable. We cannot overcome our nature.

So what else does Paul tell us in I Cor. 7? "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The Bible commands that the marital bed be well-used. In marriage, your body belongs to your spouse, since you are one. But it will not be like the movies. Hollywood depicts complete strangers consuming one another in sexual passion and then discarding each other. It is a mountain-top experience^a but between strangers usually. No one wants to see middle-aged married couples with sagging bodies, trying not to wake kids. Teenagers get uncomfortable with thoughts of how God conceived them through their parents^a because that makes sex part of normal, everyday life, not a ideal fantasy.

Luther and St. Paul say marital sex has more in common with eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels. We can abstain for a while, and should

certainly exercise self-control in these bodily matters. But it is impractical to never do them,^a the temptation is too great. So within marriage intercourse is a duty and right. St. Paul speaks of sex as a debt, something owed to the other, even when you don't feel passionate or romantic. That doesn't sound very sexy, does it? It is not the stuff of movies or songs, because the world despises God's work of marriage.

But in the one flesh union, God joins two bodies together into one. Even the husband does not have authority over his own body and neither does the wife. In marriage one's body belongs to the other^a by divine right. We are not to deprive our spouse of what is theirs. This lack self-control is why people get married or fall into a poor imitation.

"The logic of romantic love is adulterous, both extramarital and unfaithful to the workaday structure of the home."³ Changing poopy diapers, waking up to feed the baby, carrying out the trash and working jobs to buy food is not romantic. Marriage is a practical, bodily undertaking. There is nothing spiritual about it. It is easier to like someone we do not have to live with. We get see to our spouse's faults over and over again. Marriage and raising children teach much about sin, sacrifice, and the need for Christ's forgiveness. But marriage is not about personal fulfillment or an in-the-clouds romantic love. Yet, marriage is the place to be what we were made to be^a male and female. Only here is sex and our lustful desires not deadly to soul and body. In the words of our

² *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:18-19.

³ McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 17.

Supreme Court in 1952: “The family is the basic unit of our society. It channels biological drives that might otherwise become socially destructive; it ensures the care and education of children in a stable environment.”⁴

Anyone without the direct, divine gift of celibacy must be married or sin. This estate, with its troubles and practical concerns, controls the sinful sexual impulses within us. It will not satisfy you, but it is the only way not to sin for most. Intercourse within marriage is a duty, expectation, and concession to human weakness. It is to be routine and domesticated, a part of normal, everyday life, not a rare mountain-top experience. “Those who believe sex is earth shattering will put it outside of marriage.”⁵

When I hear of incompatibility within marriage, I laugh to myself. Sinners are not compatible, which is why marriage is so much work. Love in marriage is back-breaking work and sacrifice, even after 50 years together. The world says that couples should find out if they are sexually compatible before marriage. But God made it obvious^a male and female have compatible bodies. Luther speaks in plain words: “Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, and deal with a heathen, Jew, or Turk, so I may

also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the fools who forbid it. You will find plenty of Christians^a and indeed the greater part of them^a who are worse in their secret unbelief than any Jew, heathen, or Turk. A heathen is just as much God’s good creation.”⁶ Marriage is not a spiritual matter^a but a physical one. If you have a body, you were made for marriage. Unless you are not bothered by lust, marriage is a given.

(To be continued.)

Bearing the Cross in a Lutheran Synod

‘Oh no, here they go again!’ ‘They want to be everybody’s ecclesiastical supervisor; why don’t we just give it to them for a year and see how they do?’ ‘Why don’t they just start their own synod?’

The responses are getting predictable. Last month, when the ACELC released “If Not Now, When?” there was another wave of hand-wringing and dismay concerning the ACELC and its motives.

The ACELC does not want to be everybody’s ecclesiastical supervisor. (I’m not even sure how that would look.) The ACELC does not want to start its own synod. (That’s just what American Lutheranism needs: another micro-synod.) The ACELC, in all its efforts, is simply striving to live life under the cross in our Synod. If (as I’ve begun hearing again so often) being in synod means not walking in lock-step but walking on the same road,

then we all still have the duty to one another and to our Lord of doing the hard work of making sure we’re all walking the same way on that road.

Professor John T. Pless recently delivered a paper, *Cross Bearing and Life in a Lutheran Synod: What Can We Learn from Hermann Sasse*, to the Emmaus Conference at Parkland Lutheran Church in Parkland, Washington. In his paper, drawing on the writings of Hermann Sasse, Professor John Pless identifies four guiding principles for life together in a Lutheran synod under the cross. “First, the theology of the cross must cleanse us from triumphalism. Second, confessional synods must also be confessing synods. Third, bearing the cross in the synod evokes patience and persistence. Fourth, life together in the synod under the cross compels us to prayer for the brethren” (Pless p.7).

The theology of the cross must cleanse us from all triumphalism – any notion that the church can be the Church Triumphant in this age. The ACELC is not looking to recapture some mythical golden age of Missouri Synod orthodoxy. While there certainly was more unity in our synod in a bygone era, and we do desire greater unity, the sinful flesh clings to all men. Therefore, until Christ comes in all His glory, divisions will certainly remain, as St. Paul observed (I Cor. 11:18-19). We get that.

However, confessional synods must be confessing synods. Incessant internal doctrinal purification is part of the cross we bear. It is hard. Talking to one another about these important matters is hard work. It would be so much easier just to ignore one another, do our own thing, and ‘live and let live.’ Conversely, it

4 *De Burgh v. De Burgh* (1952), quoted in: Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 116.

5 McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 44.

6 *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:25.

would also be so much easier for us to take our marbles, go home and start our own synod. (That would also be easier for those who don't want to hear what the ACELC has to say. Perhaps that's why they wish we would just start our own synod.)

Throughout her history, the LCMS has chosen to be a beacon, issuing the clarion call of the truth of God's Word, refusing to be subsumed into the greater American church which has become a "church which has renounced the idea that it is possible to possess the truth and the requirements necessitated by that truth for carrying out its work." (Sasse, Hermann, tr. Matthew Harrison. "American Christianity and the Church." In *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, 47. Vol. 1. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2001.) The ACELC does not want the LCMS to slip into the dogma-free Christianity of the broader American Church where the organizing principles are ecumenical and denominational rather than confessional. (Pless p. 5). From its beginning days, what has held the LCMS together is a common confession of God's Word, not a health and retirement plan or loyalty to a 'brand name.' If the LCMS is to continue to hold together around a common confession, then we must constantly be about keeping that confession common.

Bearing the cross in the synod evokes patience and persistence. Hermann Sasse wrote, "We have been too much influenced by a certain type of sectarian Christianity, which for a long time flourished in America. The sect cannot wait; it must have everything at once, for it has no future. The church can wait for she does have a future.

We Lutherans should think of that" (Sasse, Hermann, tr. Matthew Harrison. "The Ecumenical Challenge of the Second Vatican Council." In *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, 328. Vol. 2. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2002.). The ACELC is not going anywhere. We can take a long view of things because the Lord of the Church will return when He will return. We confess that the one holy catholic and apostolic church will remain forever. And we give thanks that it is up to Christ, not us, to fulfill His promise. At the same time, "Patience is not to be confused with resignation . . . Bearing the cross in a synod means being persistent in confession even if such persistence is seen as unsettling to ecclesiastical bureaucracy geared to keeping organizational harmony by ignoring error" (Pless p.10). Sasse writes "Just as a man whose kidneys no longer eliminate poisons which have accumulated in the body will die, so the church will die which no longer eliminates heresy" (Sasse, Hermann, tr. Matthew Harrison. "The Question of the Church's Unity on the Mission Field." In *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, 190. Vol. 2. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2002.). St. Paul encourages St. Timothy to a very similar patient persistence: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (II Tim. 4:1-2). And so, the ACELC will continue patiently and persistently to point out those places where we believe the LCMS is espousing or tolerating doctrines

and practices which are contrary to the Word of God and the Book of Concord.

Finally, life together in the synod under the cross compels us to pray for the brethren. Here, I defer to Professor Pless: "The cross borne in the synod where brothers are contending for the faith and tempted, sometimes to contentiousness and at other times to indifference, drive us to pray for one another. Indeed the church is the *ecclesia orans* – the praying church . . . the cross drives us back to the hearing of God's Word and the calling upon the name of the Lord for ourselves and each other on the basis of His certain promises" (Pless p.10-11). Rest assured, we in the ACELC are praying for those within and without the LCMS that God's Word provide us "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Please join us in our prayer.

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SundayReview

The Problem With Positive Thinking

OCT. 24, 2014
By GABRIELE OETTINGEN

MANY people think that the key to success is to cultivate and doggedly maintain an optimistic outlook. This belief in the power of positive thinking, expressed with varying degrees of sophistication, informs everything from affirmative pop anthems like Katy Perry's "Roar" to the Mayo Clinic's suggestion that you may be able to improve your health by eliminating "negative self-talk."

But the truth is that positive thinking often hinders us. More

than two decades ago, I conducted a study in which I presented women enrolled in a weight-reduction program with several short, open-ended scenarios about future events — and asked them to imagine how they would fare in each one. Some of these scenarios asked the women to imagine that they had successfully completed the program; others asked them to imagine situations in which they were tempted to cheat on their diets. I then asked the women to rate how positive or negative their resulting thoughts and images were.

A year later, I checked in on these women. The results were striking: The more positively women had imagined themselves in these scenarios, the fewer pounds they had lost.

My colleagues and I have since performed many follow-up studies, observing a range of people, including children and adults; residents of different countries (the United States and Germany); and people with various kinds of wishes — college students wanting a date, hip-replacement patients hoping to get back on their feet, graduate students looking for a job, schoolchildren wishing to get good grades. In each of these studies, the results have been clear: Fantasizing about happy outcomes — about smoothly attaining your wishes — didn't help. Indeed, it hindered people from realizing their dreams.

Why doesn't positive thinking work the way you might assume? As my colleagues and I have discovered, dreaming about the future calms you down, measurably reducing systolic blood pressure, but it also can drain you of the energy you need to take action in pursuit of your goals.

In a 2011 study published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, we asked two groups of college students to write about what lay in store for the coming week. One group was asked to imagine that the week would be great. The other group was just asked to write down any thoughts about the week that came to mind. The students who had positively fantasized reported feeling less energized than those in the control group. As we later documented, they also went on to accomplish less during that week.

Positive thinking fools our minds into perceiving that we've already attained our goal, slackening our readiness to pursue it.

Some critics of positive thinking have advised people to discard all happy talk and “get real” by dwelling on the challenges or obstacles. But this is too extreme a correction. Studies have shown that this strategy doesn't work any better than entertaining positive fantasies.

What does work better is a hybrid approach that combines positive thinking with “realism.” Here's how it works. Think of a wish. For a few minutes, imagine the wish coming true, letting your mind wander and drift where it will. Then shift gears. Spend a few more minutes imagining the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing your wish.

This simple process, which my colleagues and I call “mental contrasting,” has produced powerful results in laboratory experiments. When participants have performed mental contrasting with reasonable, potentially attainable wishes, they have come away more energized and achieved better results compared with participants who either positively fantasized or dwelt on the obstacles.

When participants have performed mental contrasting with wishes that are not reasonable or attainable, they have disengaged more from these wishes. Mental contrasting spurs us on when it makes sense to pursue a wish, and lets us abandon wishes more readily when it doesn't, so that we can go after other, more reasonable ambitions.

In a recent study on healthy eating and exercise, we divided participants into two groups. Members of one group engaged in mental contrasting and then performed a planning exercise designed to help them overcome whatever obstacles stood in their way. Four months later, members of this group were working out twice as long each week as the control group and eating considerably more vegetables. In other studies, we found that people who engaged in mental contrasting recovered from chronic back pain better, behaved more constructively in relationships, got better grades in school and even managed stress better in the workplace.

Positive thinking is pleasurable, but that doesn't mean it's good for us. Like so much in life, attaining goals requires a balanced and moderate approach, neither dwelling on the downsides nor a forced jumping for joy.

Gabriele Oettingen, a professor of psychology at New York University and the University of Hamburg, is the author of “Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation.”

Hold the Line or Dance their Tune

Posted on [February 3, 2014](#) by [Rev. Paul R. Harris](#)

It's well-known that in a battle one running man or one charging man can turn the tide of battle. MacArthur's father won the Medal of Honor for picking up the fallen standard of his Civil War unit and continuing the charge. The battle analogy is all through Scripture. We "war" not against flesh and blood. Pastor Timothy is admonished to soldier on. The question is will we hold the line on the LGBT or BGLT or whatever alphabet soup represents the embracing of things perverted sexually? Confidence is not high that we will, and if we don't hold our line we will dance their tune.

NPR's "Marketplace" reported this incident at a Starbucks shareholder meeting. One investor was enraged that the company had lost money by being boycotted by the National Organization for Marriage for the company's support of gay marriage. The CEO responded that Starbucks wants to embrace diversity and the unhappy investor was welcomed to sell his shares. The room erupted in applause (11/1913 show; the incident took place March 24, 2013).

TIME, October 14, 2013 reported that Barilla pasta had been boycotted by Gay-rights activists after its chairman said ads would show only traditional families. He later apologized (9). The chairman had gone on no "homophobic" rants; didn't utter the

much touted gay "slur." (That is to call anything "gay." But I thought that is what homosexuals wish to be known as? So there really is no such thing as gay "pride.") The chairman of Barilla pasta didn't say only white people or Italians would be used in company ads or that two-mommy, two-daddy, or one man who thinks he's a woman and one woman who thinks she is a man *wouldn't* be used only that traditional families would be. But Katie bar the door, the gauntlet had been thrown down. How dare he insinuate that there were other families who weren't traditional!

Good old Coca-Cola sealed the deal with their Super Bowl ad. It dealt with American ethnic diversity against a backdrop of a touching rendition of *America the Beautiful*. The ad included a gay family. Theirs was the first Super Bowl ad ever to do so and garnered wide praise, acclaim, and shouts that at long last America has arrived. And in the storied tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah, the time of the Judges, and Paul's Rome, indeed we have.

These incidents pretty much mark the line our society, our government, and most mainline churches have drawn in the sand on this issue. Dare we cross it? Dare we even hold our own against it? The evidence suggests that the LCMS will neither cross theirs nor hold ours. On other theological issues that were social issues too: the chaplaincy,

the Boy Scouts, women voting, and closed Communion, we have not as a body been successful at holding our line let alone charging theirs. Moreover, we have found a theological way *not* to defend our original position.



In all of these issues our original, Scriptural, confessional position was regarded as right wing, far right, ultra-conservative. It is tough to be unpopular. It is hard not to bolt in fear when Satan whispers, "Give in or wither and die as an organization." And when your leaders go out of the way to parse, mince, tailor their words to sound winsome, inviting, and acceptable to the world at large, you feel like the prince of fools for being blunt and forthright neither currying favor nor denying the truth.

Be that as it may, the lines *are* drawn. It is for the sake of those on the other side and for the sheep on our side that we speak the truth in love. Who would have believed that when we did the very popular thing of embracing the military chaplaincy, a scant 70 years ago, the world would ever demand that we dance the LGBT tango? But when you let the world call the tune, you shouldn't expect that you will be singing hymns.


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								SAT
	1	2	3	4	5			6

		Trustees Meeting 6:30 PM	Advent Vespers 7:30 PM			
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	Confirmation 5:00 PM		Advent Vespers 7:30 PM			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Confirmation 5:00 PM		Advent Vespers 7:30 PM			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	NO Confirmation		Christmas Eve 7:30 PM	Christmas Day 10:00 AM	PASTOR ON VACATION 	
28	29	30	31			
PASTOR ON VACATION 						

January 2015

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
				PASTOR ON VACATION 		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Epiphany Dinner 5:00 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Trustees Meeting: 6:30 PM	Bible Stories: 10 AM Choir: 6:15 PM Colossians: 7:15 PM			
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Voters Meeting: 7:00 PM	Bible Stories: 10 AM Choir: 6:15 Colossians: 7:15 PM			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Adult Class 12:30 PM	NO Confirmation	Elders Meeting: 6:30 PM	Bible Stories: 10 AM Choir: 6:15 Colossians: 7:15 PM			
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM		Bible Stories: 10 AM Choir: 6:15 Colossians: 7:15 PM			