Anschauungen

(an’shou’oong en) n. Ger.
Opinions, Viewpoints.

By Dr. John E. Bauer, Editor

What is Marriage?

The Republican dominated Wisconsin legislature recently sent to the governor’s desk a bill which defines marriage as the legal union of a man and a woman. True to his liberal leanings, Governor Doyle vetoed the bill. Sadly, sufficient votes could not be mustered for an override. The Massachusetts Supreme Court has just legalizing same-sex marriages. On the national level, some indications suggest that the Bush administration is preparing a legal definition of marriage that would override state legislatures and state constitutions, perhaps in the form of a Constitutional amendment. I am sure that as we get closer to next November’s presidential election, this issue will receive more attention.

What appears to be happening under the guise of protecting civil rights is the slow dismantling of historic institutions. The wrong-headed notion that every type of human relationship is worthy of equal benefit under the law is not only a perversion of the Constitutional guarantee of equal protection, it is the logical extension of a distorted view of the fairness doctrine upon which most entitlement legislation is based. In a post-modern, relativistic society in which moral values are only in the eye of the beholder, justice consists of making sure that every individual’s rights are guaranteed, no matter how perverse they may be or how contradictory they may stand in relation to historically honored traditions, theories of natural law, religious beliefs, or generally observed community standards.

It’s one thing for legislators to labor over definitions of marriage, it is an entirely different matter when religious leaders begin to express the same twisted logic. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has a working task force on human sexuality that has already attracted the ire of some of its more conservative thinkers like Dr. Robert Benne of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College. Writing last May in First Things, Dr. Benne has thrown down the gauntlet by accusing the commission’s members of already having an agenda for the inclusion of diverse sexual preferences and a redefinition of marriage and family.

It will be interesting in the weeks and months to come to see how ELCA’s road map for greater inclusion unfolds with respect to family, marriage, and same sex union. If any lesson can be learned from the debacle of Eugene Robinson’s ordination as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, it should be that “enlightened” church leaders run a significant risk by conceding to the homosexual community on this most important issue. His gay relationship is now the impetus behind a growing movement by many conservative congregations to leave the Episcopal Church in America and form their own denomination. ELCA will have to determine if the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions will prevail over the post-modern delusion that individual choice is the moral equivalent to biblical, historical, and traditional laws regarding marriage. Given everything that has been reported by the ELCA’s news service, the forecast is gloomy.
The Lutheran Intellectual Tradition

It seems that Lutheran academics are interested these days in discovering (or rediscovering) what it means to be a Lutheran scholar. Panel discussions at Lutheran Deans’ Conferences, the creation of an Academy of Lutheran Scholarship, and numerous lectures, papers, and articles on the subject are evidence of such interest. Non-Lutheran thinkers like Richard Hughes and Arthur Holmes, while trying to describe advantages of the Lutheran intellectual tradition, still lack a thorough understanding of those distinctives. WLC faculty have also read and discussed papers on the subject, and have yet, so it seems, to come to a shared understanding of what this means.

Of what does a Lutheran approach to scholarship consist? To be sure, Lutheran scholarship must go beyond merely using the language of the Lutheran Confessions. Nor does it require explicit integration or application of Lutheran theology in every academic discipline. Such simplistic demands would make scholarly efforts that could be considered “Lutheran” the sole endeavor of theologians. My concern is with finding a definition of Lutheran scholarship that is useful for scholars in any discipline - scholarship which utilizes the language and methodologies of such disciplines, but in ways that are still distinctively Lutheran. I believe that continued efforts to arrive at a shared understanding of what we mean by Lutheran scholarship are necessary first, so that students and faculty at WLC can fulfill the mission of the college, and second so that Lutheran scholars in general can pursue knowledge through a distinctively Lutheran Weltanschauung.

Over the past two years I have been challenged by several coincidental lines of thought which have led me to posit the following as possible dimensions of Lutheran scholarship. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. They represent nothing more than my early thoughts and gleanings on the subject. Each dimension, or component, of Lutheran scholarship has the potential for considerable expansion and development. Each dimension also begs for practical examples of how it is carried out in the various methodologies of scholarship. I readily concede that what follows is theological, philosophical, and theoretical. I invite others to contribute thoughts to how these dimensions would express themselves in the scholarship of pedagogy, discovery, or application - to use Ernest Boyer’s typology.

First, the beginning point for true Lutheran scholarship is going to be the Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Again, that does not mean that all Lutheran scholarship explicitly uses the language of the Scriptures or the Confessions, but it does mean that such scholarship reflects the disposition or framework from which the scholar does his work. And that disposition is first and foremost reflective of the fact that the scholar is a hopelessly lost and condemned sinner who has been redeemed by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Lutheran scholarship is grounded in the three solas: sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura. When one knows that “all depends on our possessing, God’s abundant grace and blessing,” then one’s scholarly work necessarily acknowledges man’s condition with respect to his God and Savior.

Second, Lutheran scholarship is unique in its understanding of paradox, especially when faced with competing truth claims. Lutherans are comfortable with the fact that the Bible seemingly contains irreconcilable truths. For example, the doctrines of the Trinity and real presence in the sacrament present paradoxes. In epistemological terms, the Lutheran scholar must often recognize that the means used to understand revealed truth and the methods of discovery used in his or her discipline may seem to stand in contradiction to each other. The scientific method,
Anschauungen

while useful in the world of matter and energy, is of limited value in understanding the Scriptures. Rather than try to force a metaphysical reconciliation, I would argue that Lutheran scholars are required to keep their feet planted in both realms of knowledge, constantly wrestling with the tension that paradox produces. This is no easy intellectual task. Robert Benne has correctly pointed out the pitfalls that exist for Lutheran scholars who get lazy in this regard. “Paradox is another dangerous concept because lazy Lutherans use it at the beginning of intellectual engagement rather than the end. They declare “paradox” and everyone goes their own way. It ought to be declared only at the end when there are irreconcilable differences.”

This inherent sense of ambiguity-produced tension also emerges from the doctrine of the two kingdoms. Luther talked about the Christian having citizenship in the kingdom of God while simultaneously being a citizen of the kingdom of the world. While we are to be salt and light in the world, our citizenship in the kingdom of God is lived by faith. But life in the kingdom of the world is lived by reason which should be guided by faith. Again, Benne warns: “The two kingdoms can be a formula for secularization, just as it was a formula for Lutheran political quietism, and it has been used that way by a number of Lutheran educators.” The third dimension of Lutheran scholarship, then, is to recognize the concomitant responsibilities of dual citizenship without compromising either. Lutheran scholars too often have withdrawn their voices of faith when dealing in temporal matters. Lutheran scholars, therefore, have an obligation to exposit their Lutheran voices through their temporal disciplinary pursuits.

Fourth, as Gene Edward Vieth has argued, a Lutheran intellectual tradition is grounded in the Lutheran doctrine of vocation. God calls us to honor him in whatever role we find ourselves. Consequently, Lutheran scholarship honors God and seeks to fulfill God’s stated will for mankind. Lutheran scholars also believe that God uses the fruits of their scholarship as part of his providential care of the earth and its people. When we keep in mind the fact that the scholarly life is a vocation through which God can carry out his will, then there seems to be a requisite purpose for which all such scholarship is conducted. While investigating a problem or phenomenon, such inquiry is going to seek to answer the questions, “How will my scholarship give glory to God?” and, “How can it be used by God to carry out his will?”

This brings us to a fifth dimension. I believe that Lutheran scholarship is ethically directed. To glorify God through our scholarship is also to direct it toward human good. In other words, there is a moral imperative associated with Lutheran scholarship. Because one’s faith must be reflected in the actions of one’s life (James 2:14-17), the Lutheran scholar has a moral obligation to use his or her intellectual gifts in acts which “cloth and feed.” Granted, the clothing and feeding may be at times aesthetic, intellectual, or at times even esoteric, but the results of scholarship conducted by those who claim to operate within a Lutheran intellectual tradition must be directed by a biblical and Lutheran ethic. It must be beneficial for more than merely the edification of the researcher. And finally, a distinctively Lutheran intellectual tradition is one which emphasizes the theology of the cross over against the theology of glory. By this I mean that humble submission to God’s Word and our fallen weakness in fully understanding it supercede any notion of being able to metaphysically reconcile faith and reason - something Reformed scholars are obsessed with, but which they pursue in vain. The theology of the cross constantly reminds us of our fallen nature, of our inability to know God fully, to always be in an incomplete state of existence. It focuses on the redemptive act of Christ. It examines man’s condition, the fallen world, human relationships, and even the physical universe through the eyes of sin and grace. In the words of
WLC’s philosophy of education, “All knowledge in all areas of human thought and endeavor is worthy of inquiry when viewed in the light of human sin and divine grace.”

So, to me, there is required a deeply felt humility born from an understanding of God’s objective justification by grace. It is only by God’s grace that I can even sense the tension between the discoveries of the human mind and the truth God reveals about himself. And as I subjectively respond to this grace, I am also acutely aware of the “leap of faith” I must take as a Christian scholar—knowing that, like Kierkegaard, I cannot return to the ethical (or scientific) way of reasoning and acting as the sole means for understanding the meaning of “life, the universe, and everything.”

This is the tension we need to experience daily on our Lutheran college campuses. The life of the mind for a Lutheran intellectual should be very difficult. The challenge is in maintaining unyielding commitment to our academic disciplines without compromising our Lutheran Christian character, beliefs, or ways of thinking. It’s a tough road to walk. In some ways it has been easier for many Lutheran colleges to yield on religious mission. After all, the training of faculty is for the most part in the secular disciplines and it is the achievements in those disciplines that produce the rewards for which faculty strive. The danger on the other side, however, is to sacrifice academic integrity and openness by rejecting scholarly pursuits in the “secular” disciplines in the interest of maintaining doctrinal purity. Such institutions become more like Bible colleges. Honest Lutheran scholarship tries to walk the fence.

The Personality of Dogmatics

Psychology is a very inexact science, and the study of personality is even more so. Any attempt to understand the complex interplay between the processes of emotion, perception, cognition, and judgment is descriptive and speculative. Nevertheless, the study of personality and its relationship to behavior has a long theoretical history in the field of psychology. Most of those who have examined personality traits and their associated behaviors (e.g., Cattell, Eysenck, Jung, Allport et al.) include in their definitions of personality the constructs of perception (the means and manner by which information is obtained), cognition (how that information is processed, including one’s logical or emotional reaction to it), and judgment or action (how one values and acts upon knowledge). Such a description, gleaned from various theories of personality, can provide an interesting tool to understand how people think dogmatically.

As an illustration of this opinion I wish to refer to a recent online discussion on the “Church and Change” list serve about the doctrine of church fellowship. Postings were made over a period of approximately five weeks and came from pastors, teachers, and lay people. The discussion was respectful and instructional. After a careful analysis of the comments, I came to believe that it would be difficult for any reader to say that any of the writers was more right or more wrong about their stated understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship than others.

What struck me, however, were the different ways people understand and express the same doctrine and its application. This has led me to wonder if the dogmatic expression of a doctrine and the explanation for how a doctrine should be applied are functions of the personality type of the individual. For example, a number of respondents talked about the doctrine of church fellowship by offering the common proof passages, or by referring to how Luther handled doctrinal differences. One example to illustrate this style of thinking is: “Luther was doing exactly what God commanded
him to do. Luther spoke the truth in love. Like Luther, we are Christians first. But if we are also confessional Lutherans, may God give us the wisdom, discernment and courage to do likewise: speak the truth in love.” Seemingly implied is the notion that we should take what God and Luther clearly give us and tell it like it is, regardless of how people might feel about it.

Other writers, however, expressed concerns about how the doctrine of church fellowship is lived out in daily life or about how it is perceived by others. One example of such concern was the following excerpt: “When we approach fellowship in the manner we often do, it isn’t a doctrine of fellowship; it is a doctrine of exclusion. We are talking about people we won’t have fellowship with. Call it all the pretty names we like - ‘sweet gospel,’ ‘God’s holy law’ - what remains is I don’t want you in my group and here’s why.” This writer seems to be concerned with not turning people off before we have a chance to share the Gospel.

Now, I do not want the reader to think that I have any ability whatever to perform an authoritative post hoc analysis of individuals’ personality based on a few writings posted to a list serve. But my understanding of personality, particularly through the categories of the Myers-Briggs typology, based on Jungian analytic theory, suggest to me that how we articulate our understandings of certain truths is related to the mental processes we go through as we think about them. This is the definition of personality.

For example, I’ve always been comfortable in mathematics and the sciences. I began my undergraduate work in engineering studies and value the use of logic and analytic thinking when trying to solve problems. I enjoy the world of the theoretical and found the greatest satisfaction as a teacher when I taught courses in philosophy. In contrast, my lovely wife of 31 years is interpersonal, dramatic, and has a flair for the expressive arts. She reacts to problems affectively and values the emotional support of relationships. Let’s just say that there have been many times when I’ve had to concede that my being logically right was interpersonally and emotionally wrong.

But back to the doctrinal issue. My analytical mind has conjured up a number of questions while thinking about this. Can it be that the way people think about, talk about, and apply the doctrine of church fellowship is related to their personality? If so, does this explain why what may make absolute sense for some in the pastor’s study or in Bible class, is messy and troublesome in the street for others? Conversely, apart from errors in understanding a doctrine, can this also partially explain why what seems to some to be the simplest expression of love for their neighbor, raises issues of conflict with doctrine for others? When dogmatic logic gets converted to legalistic practice, is it because personalities which tend to be more intuitive, thinking, and judging try to make the world conform to the doctrinal construct? And again, conversely, when affective interpersonal concerns get converted to ecumenical relativism, is it because personalities that tend to be more sensing, feeling, and perceiving try to make doctrine and its application fit the difficult and complicated realities of the world?

What seems important from all this speculation is that greater appreciation needs to be shown for the diverse ways individuals think about doctrine. The recent list serve discussion effectively shows that many different people can be “right” about something, and yet not be totally and comprehensively “right” about it at all. Human understanding is always shaped by the mental processes that comprise personality. And human reason still suffers from original sin. It would seem that how people think about church doctrine should be considered along with what they
think. After all, eagles, owls, penguins and swans are all God’s creatures and can all be equally orthodox when it comes to dogmatics as well.

**Religion and Politics**

It was reported recently that Rev. Raymond L. Burke, former bishop of La Crosse, Wisconsin, exercised his pastoral responsibilities over against a number of members of the Roman Catholic Church who happen to be members of the Wisconsin Congressional delegation. In particular, he informed them that because of their voting records supporting abortion – a practice clearly condemned by the Catholic Church – they would no longer be eligible to receive the Sacrament of the Altar. The protest and indignation by these officials underscored the hypocrisy of many in public office who maintain liberal political agendas which are contrary to their church’s teachings. The excuse that they are elected to uphold the Constitution and must represent the views of their constituents doesn’t square with the fact that many - if not a majority - of their constituents are opposed to abortion. Honest Christians who aspire to public office run on the basis of their beliefs, not in spite of them. To create an artificial dichotomy is a blatant compromise of one’s conscience. Thank God that occasionally a politician is true to his beliefs, is elected because of them, and serves God and country by acting on them.

**You Know You’re an Old Lutheran If... .**

(Some humor from the website www.oldlutheran.com)

...during communion you hum the hymns so you can see who’s at church that Sunday.

...you think hotdish is one of the major food groups.

...your pastor refers to Milwaukee as “the Holy City.”

...you know all the words to the first verse of “Silent Night” in German but can't speak a word of it.

...you think that a WELS bride and an LCMS groom make for a “mixed marriage.”

... you think “contemporary Christian music” is tapping your foot to “A Mighty Fortress.”