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### Living In the Promises and Place of God- A Theology of The World

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# LIVING IN THE PROMISES AND PLACE OF GOD

*A THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD*

CHARLES P. ARAND &  
ERIK HERRMANN

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PLACE OF GOD**

*A THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD*

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## About the Authors

# Charles P. Arand

**D**r. Charles P. Arand is the Eugene E. and Nell S. Fincke Graduate Professor of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. A faculty member since 1989, Arand is professor of Systematic Theology, dean of Theological Research and Publication, and director of the Center for the Care of Creation.

He previously occupied the Waldemar A. and June Schuette Endowed Chair in Systematic Theology (2003-15).

His areas of interest and expertise include the Lutheran Confessions and theology of creation.

He received his Master of Divinity, Master of Sacred Theology and Doctor of Theology from Concordia Seminary (1984, 1987, 1989). He also holds a bachelor's degree from Concordia College in Milwaukee (now Concordia University Wisconsin) (1980).

He has translated the Apology of the Augsburg Confession for the Kolb-Wengert edition of the Book of Concord (Fortress). In addition to publishing more than 50 articles, he has written two books: *Testing the Boundaries: Windows into Lutheran Identity* (Concordia Publishing House); and *That I May Be His Own: A Theological Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (CPH). His other research interests include the theology of creation to which end he served as the primary drafter for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) document "Together with All Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth."

In addition to his Seminary work, he has served on CTCR (for which he has drafted three documents) and as a drafter on the Synod committee responsible for revising the Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism.

He and his wife, Betty, have two children, Becky and Benjamin; and one daughter-in-law, Bethany. He is a whooping crane enthusiast and a self-described "craniac."





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His areas of interest and expertise include the history of biblical interpretation, with a particular focus on Martin Luther and the Reformation period; history of Medieval and Reformation/early modern Europe; 20th century interpretations of Martin Luther and his theology; and the history of American Lutheranism.

His writing works include “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” in *The Annotated Luther: Church and Sacraments*, vol. 3 (Fortress Press); “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings, 1539” in *The Annotated Luther: Pastoral Writings*, vol. 4 (Fortress Press, 2016); “Living in the Promises and Places of God: A Theology of the World” with Dr. Charles Arand in the spring 2015 issue of *Concordia Journal*; and “Luther’s Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation and His Use of the Church Fathers” in *The Oxford Handbook to the Theology of Martin Luther* (Oxford University Press, 2014). He also edited the “Preface to Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Defense against the False Charge of Rebellion (1525)” and “Preface to Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Explanation of How Karlstadt Understands His Teaching concerning the Lord’s Supper and Other Teachings, and How He Wants Them to Be Understood, (1525),” both of which were published in *Luther’s Works*, volume 59 (Concordia Publishing House, 2012).

Herrmann and his wife, Aliasha, have five children; Augustine, Constansa, Mathias, Tobias and Elspeth. They live in Eureka, Mo.





# Living in the Promises and Places of God

## A Theology of the World

*Charles P. Arand and Erik Herrmann*

The 2013 symposium highlighted the importance of telling the fuller story of God that stretches from the original creation to the new creation. This has become an important task for the church when people are inundated by bits of information but don't know how to put all those pieces together into a coherent and comprehensive story. And in the church, a growing biblical illiteracy leaves many people without the ability to know how the lectionary readings fit within the overarching story . . . a story that does not begin with the fall nor end at Calvary.

After addressing the importance of story for faith and community, the symposium took up several underemphasized facets and placed them into the greater story. These facets included the role that creation plays for the entire story, the resurrection as the center of the story, and the new creation as the goal of the story.<sup>1</sup> This year, we continue to explore the fuller story of God, but with reference to how it impacts our witness in the world. Or to put it another way, how do we give faithful witness to the entire story of God within our world today? How do we tell that story, and how do we embody that story within our lives? Two helpful insights emerged from last year's symposium for thinking about our witness at this year's symposium.

First, everyone is already a part of that story because everyone is a creature of God. There is a common life that Christians and non-Christians share. We all experience the good blessings of God in which he gives life and sustains life. This world and those who live within it are the objects of God's work. Hence the first part of this year's title, "Faithful Witness to God's Story in the World around Us." Second, Christians are privy to the "fuller" story, which gives them a unique perspective on our human experiences. Christians see these experiences in light of the new creation ushered in by Christ's resurrection, which gives those experiences new depth and meaning. Hence the subtitle of this symposium, "Bringing a Unique Perspective to Common Human Experiences."

### ***Reciprocity of Witness***

A key insight from last year's symposium prompted us to explore the idea that there is reciprocity of witness between Christians and non-Christians. This arose from the recognition that the Christian way of viewing and organizing the world arises from

the doctrine of creation, namely, the ontological distinction between the creator and the creature. On one side of the ledger is God the creator. On the other side of the ledger is everything else. That means we have more in common with each other (Christian or not) and with the non-human creation than we have in common with God. What is it that we have in common with each other? We all share a common creatureliness for we are all creatures of God. As such, we all share the blessings of creaturely life and are the objects of the Creator's care and concern.

How might this realization help our witness? First, it challenges the exclusive use of some of our frequently used distinctions in terms of how we view the world. One of our challenges is to balance the church's opposition to the world with the church's common life with the world. Is our engagement with the world only one of confrontation and conflict? Can we only say "no" to the world? And even if we can say "yes" to some things, must our "no" always be louder than our "yes"? Consider the following.

How do we view the world in which we live? That word "world" has almost automatic connotations of "bad" and "dangerous" among most Christians. This is all the more tempting in our post-Christian world when Christianity is losing its influence upon the larger culture, an influence that it has enjoyed for the last seventeen hundred years or so. It now finds itself in an increasingly hostile culture. There is biblical warrant for this—after all, we are called to be in the world but not "of the world" (Jn 17:14–15). And Luther often groups the world with the devil and our flesh (SC, II.11).<sup>2</sup> But is there a danger to viewing things in such exclusive categories? Does it create a false dichotomy in which we either embrace this world or

embrace the next world?  
And when we do that, do we see culture as essentially negative? Again, the greater story of the creation to the new creation reminds us that this is God's world.

## *God works through both Christians and non-Christians for the sake of his creation.*

And God is at work in this world. He remains present and active in this world.

How do we talk about non-Christians? Do we see them only in terms of "us and them"? "Outsiders and insiders"? "Saved and lost"? This is true and quite biblical (e.g., lost sheep) when viewed solely in terms of salvation. That is to say, there are those who believe in Jesus and are saved; there are those who do not believe in Jesus and thus are not saved. But the greater story offers a wide-angle field of vision and highlights another underlying reality. We are all creatures of God. This means that we have much in common with non-Christians. We share common places within creation where we experience God's lavish creaturely gifts. And we share common human experiences as we live out our lives in those places. And God works through both Christians and non-Christians for the sake of

his creation. This suggests that as Christians we might be able to gain helpful insights into God's creation from non-Christians.

And how do we talk about our witness among non-Christians? Do we talk about the need to bring the story of God to them? Do we think of witness as speaking a word of the gospel only to those who know nothing of it? This is understandable given that the direction of salvation in Christ is one way. After all, the Son of God goes forth from the Father into the world. He alone descends into the depths of death and brings forth a new life in a new creation. There is no way to discover this other than through God sending people into the world with glad tidings of his promises.

And yet we go into a world that God himself has created. This means that we are giving witness to the story of which non-Christians are already a part—even though they are unaware of that story. So what does it mean that our witness of the gospel goes out into a world that God has made? It means that we go out into a world in which we receive not only God's saving work but also his creating work. In that regard, we stand alongside everyone else as fellow creatures of God. And we live in the same world created by God. So what happens to our witness when we place ourselves on the same side of the ledger as non-Christians, co-recipients of God's goodness and grace? And what happens to our witness when we relate to the world in terms of its promised future in which all people are seen as potential recipients of the Spirit's life-giving breath? Looking at our neighbor and the goodness of creation through the lens of the third article of the Creed and the eschatological work of the Spirit, we may in fact be looking at our future brother or sister in Christ!

### ***God's Goodness in Creation***

Consider again the title of this article, "Living in the Promises and Places of God." We know quite well that it is God's word, God's promises, that create life and places for life. And these "places" are not just the location, the zip code, the terra firma upon which we live, but "places" also include our experiences within God's creation. Now as Christians, the heart and center of our faith and life are God's promises for salvation. And these promises create a unique and peculiar place: a community that lives by and through his word—a spoken word, a sacramental word, a written word. In this place, his promises draw in the stuff of the earth and his creation—water, bread, wine, our lips, and our language—and drag them into the beginnings of his new creation. What we experience through these promises in this place are the means of his grace—grace which gives us confident and certain hope and a vision of a life that finds its future in Christ, riding on his coattails through death and into resurrection. The promises of this "grace place" not only point us to a future world, they also change our view of the present world around us. The beauty and goodness that we see has an ultimate tomorrow, the pain and suffering that we see does not. And so this sacred space, as it pulls in the stuff of this world to promise its renewal, also urges us back out into our present world, into the goodness that remains

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in creation, knowing from whence it came and to where it will ultimately go.

Martin Franzmann distinguished the words grace and goodness as a way to express how the first-article promises of God

can be commonly experienced by both Christians and non-Christians.<sup>3</sup> (This is perhaps better than the Reformed tradition which uses “special grace” and “common grace”—categories that are too readily married to other distinctive doctrines like limited atonement and double predestination.) However, it’s the continuity between the two—between God’s “grace” of salvation and God’s “goodness” in creation—that we wish to stress here. Both are unmerited and both spring from the loving-kindness of God. Thus you may recall Luther’s words on the first article in the catechism, “all this out of divine fatherly goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.” So both the creaturely gifts and redemptive gifts of God are given freely out of his undeserved generosity. Both kinds of gifts have the power to draw us to God, to consider well his benefits, and to give him thanks.

Now to be clear, we know that only in the means of grace where God has promised to be present in Christ pro nobis (for us) do we have the certain clarity of who God is and the nature and scope of his love for us. Simply experiencing God’s goodness in creation is not enough and cannot by itself lead us into true knowledge and faith in God. In fact, in our experience of God’s goodness in creation (as seen above) we are likely to miss the Creator and trust and worship the creature. The irony is (as in Romans 1) that precisely because there is so much genuine goodness in God’s world, there are more opportunities for people to make false religions on the basis of it. This is one of Luther’s important insights in the Heidelberg Disputation as he sets forth a theology of the cross over against a theology of glory. Though one must affirm the inherent goodness of creation, Luther notes that without the perspective brought on by the cross, we will use the best things in the worst way, that is, we will ascribe divinity to them.<sup>4</sup>

In the same way, C. S. Lewis notes that there seems to be a “general rule in the moral universe which may be formulated ‘the higher, the more in danger.’ . . . It is great men, potential saints, not little men, who become merciless fanatics. . . . Of all bad men religious bad men are the worst. Of all created beings wickedest is one who originally stood in the immediate presence of God.”<sup>5</sup> Further, in *The Great Divorce* he writes, “It’s not out of bad mice or bad fleas you make demons, but out of bad archangels. . . . Lust is baser than . . . mother-love or patriotism or art: but lust is less likely to be made into a religion. . . . Brass is mistaken for gold more easily than clay is.”<sup>6</sup>

Still, in spite of such proclivities, we ought to not completely abandon the positive power that the goodness of creation promises for witness. As Paul preached to the Iconians in Acts 14, “[God] did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” And as Luther noted in his Genesis lectures “if you ponder in your heart the whole course of nature and of this whole life . . . you will find more good than bad things and you will also see that a very small part is subjected to the power of the devil” (LW 6:90). Likewise in his lectures on Jonah, the experience of creation gives a certain positive illumination to all people so that God may be regarded as “kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent. And that is a bright light indeed” (LW 19:54).

### ***The Goodness of Being a Creature***

In the first article of the Large Catechism, Luther makes a rather surprising confession. He opens by quoting the first article of the Apostles Creed and then asks, “What does it mean to believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”? He answers that question not by describing or detailing all of God’s works in the entire universe. Instead, he answers it by saying that it means, “I am God’s creature”!

But what does it mean to be God’s creature? It means that I receive from God life and all that sustains my life in this world. As a creature, I am by definition contingent and dependent. To borrow from the Apostle Paul, “What do I have that I have not received?” (1 Cor 4:7). As one who does not have life of oneself, as one who is not self-sustaining or autonomous, I have to look somewhere for the support and sustenance of my life. Luther concludes the first article in the Small Catechism, “for which it is my duty, to thank and praise, serve and obey.” He says the same thing in virtually the same words in the Large Catechism, but then adds, “Serve and obey according to the Ten Commandments.”

And that brings us to the first commandment. Here we learn that for Luther the first commandment is not a question of faith versus non-faith. For the truth is that no one can live without faith! So given that everyone has to put their faith and hope in something or someone, the question becomes one of true faith versus false faith. And what determines whether faith is true or false is whether the object of faith is the true God or not (LC I.3).

So the question now becomes, “Where shall we turn? Where shall we look for that which ‘supports this body and life’?” As creatures, we cannot help but look somewhere. To whom should we direct our thanks and praise when we experience wonder and gratitude?

So what implications does this carry for our witness to God’s story in the world? Well, and by way of contrast, consider one of the most popular models of door-to-door evangelism several decades ago. A program known as Evangelism Explosion provided a way of training people for witness by giving them initial questions with which to open a conversation followed by an outline to guide the conversation.<sup>8</sup> In its

Lutheran form, Evangelism Explosion became Dialog Evangelism.<sup>9</sup>

Key to those programs was initiating conversation through questions such as: “If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would go to heaven?” “If God were to ask you why he should let you into his heaven, what would you say?” These questions, designed to get at the certainty of salvation and to diagnose one’s reliance on works, opened the door for a gospel presentation.

But what are the underlying assumptions of those questions? Take the first question: “If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would go to heaven?” It assumes that people believe that there is such a thing as heaven. And it assumes that people want to go to heaven. Such assumptions make sense in a culture that is undergirded and shaped by the Christian story. And it makes sense when encountering people who have some residual memory of the Christian story from childhood. But are those assumptions fading in our culture today? We may not be able to work with such assumptions in the future.

Now, let’s consider how Luther’s treatment of the first commandment might offer an alternative. Luther begins with the anthropological assumption that all people are creatures. As such, they cannot live without centering their lives on someone or something. They must look for life somewhere. This anthropological assumption suggests that first and foremost we listen to people before we speak. In particular, we listen to how they express the creaturely need for a center.

Now, we tend to focus on the negative side of Luther’s anthropological insight, namely, they have latched onto one idol after another in their search for an anchor that holds. You might say they look for God “in all the wrong places”!<sup>10</sup> They only turn to false Gods, “indeed they can do no other” (FC II), and so they need to repent and turn to the true God. And that is most certainly true! But that answer only takes as its starting point the sinfulness of the person.

But is there a positive side to Luther’s anthropological insight, one that affirms the creaturely need for God? Might it be said that while having idols is an affront to God it is at the same time a witness to our creaturely need and longing for God? Doesn’t the constant search for new idols capture something of Augustine’s famous statement: “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee, O Lord”? Let’s explore this positive side a bit more in terms of creatures and creaturely gifts.

As Lutherans, we are accustomed to speaking about the anthropology of Christians before God (*coram deo*) in terms of being simultaneously sinners and saints (*simul justus et peccator*). In the eyes of the law we are sinners; in the eyes of the gospel, we are justified before God. But what about all humans including those who do not confess Jesus as Lord? I would propose that we think of all people as simultaneously creatures and fallen creatures (*simul creatus et peccator*).<sup>11</sup> This distinction is the theological contribution and importance of Article I of the Formula of Concord.

This distinction reminds us that in dealing with other people, we are dealing with

fellow creatures of God who are made in the image of God. No matter how sinful, they remain the good creation of God. Years ago, Jaroslav Pelikan wrote an article on the anthropology of the Lutheran Confessions in which he made the important observation that creatureliness is the foundation of the anthropology of the entire Book of Concord.<sup>12</sup> And as human creatures of God, they exhibit the creaturely need and desire and longing for God. To be sure, they look for God “in all the wrong places” and thus stand under his judgment, but we can affirm their creaturely need for an anchor to their lives.

So, our starting point is to listen to find points of connection with the entire story of God. We are listening for how they experience the creatureliness that they share with us. We are listening both to affirm the good and to redirect the wrong.

### **Implications for Witness**

Now let’s bring together these two strands—God’s creation and our creatureliness—and draw on some of the possible implications for shaping our understanding of witness in and with the world.

Our colleague, David Schmitt, shared a story with us a couple of months ago about one of his friends. His friend was not Christian and neither was his wife. Though David had had many conversations with him about faith, God, and the gospel over the years, he stayed away from the church. Then one day, after a racquetball game, he asked Dave if he would come with him to church on Sunday—his wife and his newborn daughter were getting baptized. “How did this happen?” asked an incredulous David (wondering how the Lord had worked through their discussions to bring this about). His friend responded, “Remember the big-screen TV you helped me unload?” Dave remembered. “Well,” he said, “one afternoon we were watching the game on TV and my wife says to me, ‘I’d like to go to church.’ I’m like, ‘What!’ and she says, ‘No, really, think about it. We’ve got it so good right now. This house, our family, our health, your work with troubled kids. Everything is just so very . . . good. I just feel like I need to give thanks to someone. I’d like to go to church.’” And that was the beginning of her journey with her daughter to baptism.

It’s interesting; she caught something—caught a glimpse of something more in her experience of creation’s goodness. Her heart was drawn to gratitude toward an unknown. Obviously, what she expressed is only part of the story; the tragedy in creation that cuts through every human heart and is in need of redemption is also part of the story. But this is a beginning, a beginning found not in law and guilt and theological knowledge of sin but in the common place, the shared space of God’s

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goodness to his creatures. It is a beginning found in flourishing and in gratitude, gratitude which has more in common with faith than unbelief. As G. K. Chesterton once put it, “The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.”<sup>13</sup>

In Elizabeth Gilbert’s novel, *The Signature of All Things*, the main character is Alma Whittaker, a woman born in 1800 who fell in love with botany.<sup>14</sup> While still unmarried, living on her father’s many-acre estate outside Philadelphia, the familiarity of the countryside began to dull her curiosity. That is until one day she noticed some mosses growing on a boulder. Gilbert writes,

Alma put the magnifying lens to her eye and looked again. Now the miniature forest below her gaze sprang into majestic detail. She felt her breath catch. This was a stupefying kingdom. This was the Amazon jungle as seen from the back of harpy eagle. She rode her eye above the surprising landscape, following its paths in every direction. Here were rich, abundant valleys filled with tiny trees of braided mermaid hair and miniscule, tangled vines. Here were barely visible tributaries running through that jungle, and here was a miniature ocean in a depression in the center of the boulder, where all the water pooled.<sup>15</sup>

Later in the book, Alma is asked about religion and whether she believes in an afterworld. She replies, “I have never felt the need to invent a world beyond this world, for this world has always seemed large and beautiful enough for me. I have wondered why it is not large and beautiful enough for others—why they must dream up new and marvelous spheres or long to live elsewhere, beyond this dominion . . . but that is not my business. We are all different, I suppose.”<sup>16</sup>

Two things stand out in this excerpt. First, Alma’s demurring about religion is really the rejection of the escapist narrative, the truncated version of the Christian story. This perception of Christianity is at best aloof from creation, at worst hostile to it. Alma cannot reconcile this view with the world that she knows and experiences, a world beautiful and vast that invites endless curiosity and delight. How often have we encountered people who are unimpressed with Christianity largely because all they have encountered is a foreshortened Christian story that seems disinterested in the world? What might have been Alma’s response if she were asked instead about a hope in which all of the goodness and wonder of the world that she has experienced has an eternal future?

The second thing to be observed is that “atheists feel awe, too.”<sup>17</sup> God’s world has the capacity to draw one into a sense of wonder and delight, a longing for and a loving of the life that he created, even when acknowledgment of God as its author is wanting. The experience is filled with possibility, both good and bad, as a stepping stone to faith or as the beginning of idolatry. So often it is the latter. But the Spirit—

who broods over the earth as the Lord and giver of life—may take the experience captive for faith and Christ.

### **Directions for Mutual Witness**

These insights open the possibility of reciprocity—a mutual witness in which the lives of both Christians and non-Christians can bear witness to part of the story of God.

First, it means that Christian witness entails listening. Listening certainly means being attentive to that which is missing in the lives of people who do not yet know Christ. To be sure, it means being wary of that which threatens and undermines the gospel—those things in human experience that can so easily become a false religion. In this kind of listening, we are relatively well-versed. We know well the negative effects of the culture upon Christian witness. We are familiar with the things that erode our moral life, that erode the presuppositions of our faith. But what about listening for that which is consonant with the faith . . . those things that contribute to joy, hope, and love? Can we be witnessed to? Can non-Christians enrich our own understanding of what God is doing in this world?

We would suggest, yes. And not just because it is a strategically good idea to have a little give-and-take when we talk to non-Christians. But yes, because it is a necessary consequence of confessing the fuller biblical story. Part of confessing that story is to confess that it is far bigger than any of us can grasp. It is cosmic in scope; the goal of salvation history is that God would be all in all. This means that our experience of all of the intricate details of what God has done and will do is still unfolding—we are still growing into Christ, we are still being conformed to his image—and the whole world waits with eager anticipation for the full redemption of God’s children.

Luther’s theological insights in the catechism highlight a reciprocal, antiphonal theology of the Creed (moving from the first article to the third article and back again). This also has implications for reciprocity in witness. To be sure, the direction of salvation in the world is one way—God coming to us, descending into our world in his Son to bring it down into the depths of death and bring it out again into the life of a new world and new creation. But witness in the world does not move only in a single direction. If Christians stand at the receiving end of God’s grand creating and saving work and word, then there is a sense that we stand alongside everyone. When we fully appreciate that no aspect of creation, no creature of God is untouched by his word and work, our witness gains a certain posture in which the universal scope of God’s grace becomes the object of our discourse. In this discourse mutual witness is possible as the lives of both Christians and non-Christians function as a testimony to

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part of the story of God.

What does this reciprocal witness look like? Obviously we can learn from others outside the church about the creation, in the realm of the first article: E. O. Wilson's directing us into the remarkable world of the ant, or Neil deGrasse Tyson conducting us into the wonders of the cosmos. But just as our experience of the creation—with the eyes of faith—can point us to the new creation, can this also be true of what we might gain from those outside the church? Do their acts of love and beauty, their patient endurance of suffering, their delight in the world illumine our understanding of the gospel and the goal of creation? Again we would say, yes. When the creation gives us a glimpse of the wonder of what God will do, we do not experience this in isolation but in community with our fellow human beings. And non-Christians contribute to this experience so that—perhaps even without faith and understanding themselves—they deepen ours. Whether in the restlessness of the heart of which St. Augustine spoke, or, at the other end of the spectrum, in the joy and beauty of Beethoven's Ninth, Christ becomes the meaning and telos of it all.

Yet in the end, the Christian insight into the world—its beginning, its ending, and its center—is unique and indispensable. In the gospel of Christ we have truly been given a treasure that is found nowhere else in creation. The story of God's creation and re-creation of the world encompasses more than the Christian experience, but it is the Christian experience that finally holds the story together and gives it full meaning. This is the privilege and challenge of faithful Christian witness, to play our part and give voice to the chapter that serves as the key to the entire story.

C. S. Lewis once described the Christian gospel precisely as such a missing chapter:

Supposing you had before you a manuscript of some great work, either a symphony or a novel. There then comes to you a person, saying, "Here is a new bit of the manuscript that I found; it is the central passage of that symphony, or the central chapter of that novel. The text is incomplete without it. I have got the missing passage which is really the center of the whole work." The only thing you could do would be to put this new piece of the manuscript in that central position, and then see how it reacted on the whole of the rest of the work. If it constantly brought out new meanings from the whole of the rest of the work, if it made you notice things in the rest of the work which you had not noticed before, then I think you would decide that it was authentic. On the other hand, if it failed to do that, then, however attractive it was in itself, you would reject it.

Now, what is the missing chapter in this case, the chapter that Christians are offering? It is the story of the Incarnation—the story of a descent and resurrection. . . . [This] is the missing chapter in this novel, the chapter on which the whole plot turns; . . . that God

really has dived down into the bottom of creation, and has come up bringing the whole redeemed nature on His shoulders. The miracles that have already happened are, of course, as Scripture so often says, the first fruits of that cosmic summer which is presently coming on. Christ has risen, and so we shall rise.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Our Christian witness in the twenty-first century will take place in a culture that knows less and less of the Christian story. And what fragments people do know will probably make little sense since they will not know how they fit within the larger story. So it becomes imperative that we relearn how to tell the story, the full story that stretches from creation to the new creation. But as we tell that story, we will discover new opportunities for witness. This includes not only the way in which we diagnose the brokenness of this world and human lives, but also the way in which we live out the underlying truth that this world remains God's world. In it he is present and active so that, as we live alongside our fellow human creatures, we are "richly and daily supplied" with a profusion of possibility for faithful witness to God's goodness and grace.

## Endnotes

- 1 See *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2014).
- 2 All references to the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
- 3 Thanks to Jim Voelz who recounted for us this distinction having heard it at a Franzmann lecture.
- 4 See Heidelberg Disputation, theses 22–24: “That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened. The ‘law brings the wrath’ of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.” See also the explanation to thesis 24: “Indeed ‘the law is holy,’ ‘every gift of God good,’ and ‘everything that is created exceedingly good,’ as in Gen. 1. But, as stated above, he who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God.”
- 5 C. S. Lewis, “Reflections on the Psalms,” in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1991), 146f.
- 6 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 106.
- 7 The Large Catechism, II.13 in Kolb and Wengert, 432.
- 8 Developed by D. James Kennedy in 1962.
- 9 Developed by W. Leroy Biesenthal and published by The Board of Evangelism of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
- 10 “Lookin’ for Love,” the song from which this lyric is taken was written by Wanda Mallette, Bob Morrison, and Patti Ryan, and recorded by American country music singer Johnny Lee.
- 11 “The anthropology of the Lutheran Confessions can be described in terms of two paradoxes, each involving a tension between interrelated contradictions. These paradoxes are summed up in two simul-relationships. To be genuinely and fully human means to be simul *creatus et peccator*, and also to be simul *peccator et iustus*.” William W. Schumacher, *Who Do I Say That You Are: Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 149. A fuller discussion of it is covered on pages 150–172.)
- 12 Jaroslav Pelikan, “Doctrine of Creation in Lutheran Confessional Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26, no. 8 (August 1, 1955): 569.
- 13 G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 61.
- 14 Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Signature of All Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
- 15 *Ibid.*, 161.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 497.
- 17 See Barbara King, “Atheists Feel Awe, Too” *Cosmos & Culture* (blog), August 28, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2014/08/28/343952506/atheists-feel-awe-too>.
- 18 C. S. Lewis, part I, chap. 9, in *God in the Dock*.









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