

Dialogue

This is a regular feature in which we share correspondence from our readers in order to extend the discussion created by articles in previous issues of *CHARIS*. Letters are generally reprinted in their entirety, as is. However, personal or extraneous material is usually excised. The editor reserves the right to provide a response to any letter when providing a balanced perspective calls for it. Readers are invited to write or email comments and reactions to the editor. Any correspondence addressed to the editor may be included in *Dialogue* at the discretion of the editor without seeking permission of the writer.

Dear Dr. Bauer,

Thank you for the work you do with *Charis* magazine. I look forward to reading each issue. I expect your magazine to stimulate my thinking about my faith. Not one issue has disappointed me in that regard.

The Lent 2005 issue had two articles that I think have big lapses in their argumentation. I think the topics of both articles are serious enough that I should e-mail you about them. Perhaps I won't be alone in my reactions. It seems you get a lot of e-mails: another part of your magazine that I look forward to reading each month.

On pages four and five, you discussed "Women and Voting." You say that Thesis 18 of WELS *Principles* regarding roles of men and women is "based" on the "premise . . . that the act of casting a vote . . . is an exercise of authority." Then you say, "Sorry, but it just ain't so." I was surprised that you didn't speak more carefully. You quote Thesis 18 in the article, including the phrase in the thesis, "when such votes exercise authority over men." So, the thesis itself admits that voting is not necessarily an exercise of authority over another person. It is not accurate for you to say the thesis is based on the premise that "the act of casting a vote . . . is an exercise of

authority," when the thesis only says that the act of casting a vote *can be* an exercise of authority.

It would have been more accurate for your article to say something like: "The individual's act of voting is by no means always an exercise by the individual of authority over other people." Then you would not be disagreeing with Thesis 18, which only says that, in some situations, voting can be an exercise of authority over others.

Your article also implies that a vote can never be an exercise of authority over another person and that voting rights never involve authority over the other people with the same voting rights. Perhaps this is what you meant when you wrote that you disagree with the premises of Thesis 18. Do you disagree that casting a vote could *ever* be an exercise of authority over another person? You didn't come right out and say that in your article. One unlikely example, what if only two women voters show up at a voters' meeting and on the agenda is the excommunication of a man? If those women carry out the excommunication through their votes, have they not exercised authority over that man, telling him through their votes that he may not take communion at their church's altar?

Aside from casting votes, a voting member can exercise authority in other ways. In looking through my copy of the book *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance*, there are a number of actions a voting member of a parliamentary body can take that allow that member to impose his or her will, within limits, on the other members of the voting body. For example, "Objection to Consideration"—the person objecting may interrupt another member who has the floor, the person does not need to be recognized by the chairman, the person does not have to be seconded, the person may not be debated with, and the person forces the body to vote on whether to consider the current motion or question of privilege. Similar is "To Call for a Special Order." There are several other examples in the book, where a person, as a voting member of the body, has the right to

interrupt speakers, force votes on matters, and so on. All of these involve imposing one's will on another. All of them show that the individual voting member has the right and authority to stop another person from speaking and demand to be heard. Just because a process as a whole is egalitarian doesn't mean that there are no parts of that process that involve disparity in authority.

The second article I'm responding to is on pages thirty-two and thirty-three. It is the "Statement Regarding Non-WELS Students in the College's Choirs." I thank you for stimulating me to reread our synod's *Doctrinal Statement* on church fellowship. I was surprised that the statement doesn't address the difference between expressing fellowship privately and expressing it publicly. There are issues of causing offense that can keep a person from doing things in public which are God-pleasing to do in private. I didn't see where either the *Doctrinal Statement* or your magazine's "Statement" address or come to grips with this. But it is a scriptural distinction and one that has frequently been confessed in our synod in the past. Your "Statement" may agree with the *Doctrinal Statement*, but it doesn't address the biblical concept of public offense. Sure, you should practice vigorous, faith-strengthening fellowship with the Christian WLC student who, in weakness, is sinning by his or her public support (financial support, prayer support, "that's the church I'm a member of" support, people-see-the-student-worshiping-there-on-Sunday support) of a false church. It doesn't follow from that that it's good to practice that fellowship publicly on a choir tour, where the impression made on the various listeners could sinfully cause offense. Your "Statement" didn't address this issue at all. Your "Statement" only shows that it is sound and loving for you to practice fellowship with the weak Christian student, not that it is sound and loving to practice that fellowship standing on the risers of a WLC choir tour. This would be a lapse in the logic of the article. It should be addressed. I wish the same issue were also addressed in our synod's *Doctrinal Statements*, because it is very practical.

I hope I have written in a kind and clear way. I do appreciate your work and your college. May the Lord preserve our synod in God-pleasing unity!

Pastor Christopher S. Doerr
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Waupun, Wisconsin

Dr. Bauer responds...

Dear Pastor Doerr,

Thank you so much for writing—and especially in such a thoughtful and considerate manner. Your letter exemplifies the nature of dialogue that I hope the journal stimulates. It stands in contrast to what I am used to receiving. Thanks.

I'll respond to the first issue. I've asked Dr. Mark Braun, author of the fellowship article, to respond to the second.

To the voting issue: You are correct that the Principles stipulate by inference that not all voting necessarily implies the exercise of authority ("when such votes exercise authority over men"). However, I have yet to see an example of a congregation taking the trouble to discern when any vote does or does not exercise authority over men. I do know of congregations that circumvent the authority issue by taking "straw polls" or other such means to ascertain majority opinion, and then taking an official "vote" by men to formally accomplish the same end. So while I agree with the technical understanding of the words of the Principles, the de facto application of those principles has led to the exclusion of women from any vote on any issue in the vast majority of congregations.

With respect to your argument that exercising some of the procedural prerogatives allowed under Robert's Rules may allow for the exercise of authority by women over men, I would respond by saying that the authority is in the rules and not in the individuals who exercise them. For example, if a board adopts Robert's Rules of Order as the formal set of procedures it will follow in conducting its business, then such procedures as you have identified provide for the orderly interruption of business in order to address other procedural matters. This in and of itself is not an exercise of authority because the authority resides in

the rules themselves and not in the individual who exercises them. Now I suppose it is always possible for a woman to use such procedural rules to disrupt or cut off debate. Such is the case with a man as well. It is the board itself, however, that has control of those procedures and which can act to overcome the inappropriate behaviors of any member if they are using procedures to disrupt the harmonious conduct of business. Boards occasionally have to deal with the misuse of procedures. This isn't a gender-specific issue, however.

This brings me to my conclusion on the matter. The participation of women in congregational decisions is not a matter of form or procedure—it is a matter of attitude and behavior. In this regard, it is no different than the Christian spirit and behavior expected of men. But behavior and attitude aside, I still think that authority resides in the board as a whole and not in any of its individual members.

Thanks again for your thoughts.

Dr. Braun also responds...

Dear Pastor Doerr,

John Bauer passed along your email and asked me to reflect and respond to your last paragraph, regarding the choir/fellowship statement.

You are correct that the synod's Doctrinal Statement on fellowship does not address the difference between expressing fellowship privately and publicly, and you are also correct that this difference is attested to in other synodical documents of the time. I cannot say what has been done by our campus pastor or others in every situation, but I am sure that the issue of offense has been addressed in some situations regarding student participation in choir; it certainly has been a determining factor in not permitting students to lead chapel.

I will be sure that this issue is included in the ongoing conversation we have about our touring choir. You did write in a kind and clear manner, for which I thank you.

Mark Braun

Hello Dr. Bauer,

I am curious about the **CHARIS** journals: you make a point to feature Christian artists on the cover, yet there hasn't been much written about art on the inside. I'm not criticizing because I know this is a pretty rare thing in the art world right now (Christians writing about art and particularly Christian art) and something I hope to explore in my graduate studies. I'm just wondering if you plan on showing topics related to art in the future?

Kate Mau
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Dear John,

Greetings from Arizona Lutheran Academy. I just finished reading your research article, "The Lutheran Elementary School, Early Childhood Education, and Congregational Ministry Focus." I want to thank you for your thought provoking study.

Have you ever considered a study to identify those congregations who have a Lutheran elementary school, are also successful in outreach, and what positive correlations exist among those churches that are successful that are not exhibited in the others? Sort of a Jim Collins "Good to Great" study to pinpoint churches with schools who really walk the talk and why. Is it leadership? Is it location? Is it tuition structure? Is it school culture? Do such success stories exist at all? Anecdotally, I have my theories, and others have theirs. I think that such a study could help provide groundbreaking insight into areas that are critical to our synod's future, and would seem to be especially legitimate in light of your recent studies regarding negative correlations between schools and outreach.

At Arizona Lutheran Academy, we are considering the startup of a preschool and elementary school on our campus. We are determined, however, to create a school of outreach into our growing community. (ALA is situated in one of the fastest growing areas

in the Greater Phoenix Area.) We believe that leadership, school culture, tuition structure (cost-based tuition, need based aid), and family assimilation strategies will all be key in reaching our goal of a successful, outreach-minded school. But such a study would also assist us in validating our plans.

If you've already done research in this area and I've missed it—please point me in the right direction. I genuinely appreciate your work at CHARIS. Thanks for listening.

John A. Sebald
Director of Development
Arizona Lutheran Academy

Dr. Bauer responds...

Thanks for your letter. I have indeed thought about some of the questions you have raised. At this point in our research, we have only identified those congregations over a five-year period of time that exhibit strong performance in outreach as measured by the number of adult confirmations. The next step will be to do extensive on-site study of the 8-10 congregations that are succeeding and examine some of the factors you have identified. My own hypothesis is that the single greatest contributing factor—whether a school is involved or not—is the vision and leadership of the pastor. For now, however, we are continuing to conduct statistical analysis of the available data—until we get funding to pay for the extensive travel that will be required for the on-site visits.

Dear Dr. Bauer,

Thank you for the research project on Lutheran Elementary Schools. I found it quite enlightening. Perhaps as a follow up you might look at the “output” of our Lutheran Elementary Schools, i.e. how many WELS pastors, teachers and lay leaders were educated in our Lutheran Elementary Schools. I look forward to your research on Effective Evangelistic Churches. For some time I've wondered why some churches grow while others languish. I pray that your research will benefit all of us in the ministry. Thank you!

God's blessings to you and your ministry,

Rev. Phil Malchow
Trinity Lutheran Church
El Paso, Texas

Hi John,

I received the material below from another WELS Pastor:

I read the article. Three observations: First, someone has WAY too much time on their hands! Second, it is impossible to really prove anything from “stats” in the WELS. A huge amount of “fibbing” goes on in these reports every year by most if not all my peers. I know for a fact - indeed, directly from the mouths of some of the Pastors of these “successful” churches - that their definition of “adult confirmand,” or “convert” varies considerably. One CA Pastor, famous for his huge number of annual ACs, told me that he doesn't believe in “professions” or “affirmations” of faith. He counts every adult who comes into his church as a convert - except for actual “transfers.” (He told me that he once took in a retired LCMS Pastor and added him to the “convert” rolls!) Another Pastor of a well-known Phoenix mission took in a number of WELS members by transfer from other WELS churches, but since they wanted to be re-baptized, he counted them as new converts, even though one was a DMLC grad and the head of the education program at a nearby WELS congregation! Thus, my guess is that there is actually a LOT FEWER “real” conversions in the WELS than reported. Indeed, our “CQ” (conversion quotient) is probably a negative number! Third, maybe I missed it, but I didn't see any comment on those Biblical references about things getting worse and worse for Christ's Church on earth - so much so that if He would not hasten His return, there wouldn't be a single believer left (many of the visions in Rev. predict the same thing). Now, I'm not saying we should give up proclaiming the Gospel, or do it poorly. However, any attempt to quantify the Holy Spirit's work in one place, then reproduce the

“success” in another place, is doomed to failure. Let’s just preach the Gospel the best way we know how and let God take care of results.

Rev. Stephen Spencer

Dr. Bauer responds (in italics) and Pastor Spencer provides additional rejoinders...

First, your friend is right; I have too much time on my hands—and I actually get paid for it!

What, you don’t actually teach anymore. WLC must indeed be well-heeled to afford such a luxury.

Second, the thing you are forgetting about regarding the use of statistics is that the larger the population being studied, the smaller the deviation due to anomalies such as you describe. That’s why we calculate standard deviation. With 1,250 congregations in the data set, a few liars aren’t going to change the result.

Perhaps you’re right. I won’t argue statistical analysis with you. It’s a very imprecise science at best. But you didn’t comment on the examples. What do you suppose prompts otherwise honest men to count retired LCMS Pastors as “converts,” and “re-baptize” DMLC grads?

Finally, you are also right that successful ministry strategies in one place are contextual. What works in one place may not work in another. The rub comes when one tries to determine how “to preach the Gospel the best way we know how.” What does this mean? A theme and three parts from the pulpit to whomever happens to walk in the door? Seeker services in the community room of the local bank? Children’s sermons? Using the Bible to teach ESL classes to Chinese medical students? Etc., etc., etc. I’m not suggesting any one of these over another. But merely “preaching” with no concern about how to build the audience isn’t going to do much to reach the lost, either.

You’re confusing man’s work with God’s. It’s my job to preach. It’s God’s job to “build the audience.” I trust Him to do His job and do it well. He always has. The miracle is that He

trusts me to do mine, even when I don’t do it as well as I should!

I do happen to believe that sharing strategies among pastors and lay leaders does stimulate creativity and can lead to the development of ministry strategies (that of course center around sharing the Gospel) that are appropriate for the ministry setting.

[From Dr. James Kiecker, Professor Emeritus of History at Wisconsin Lutheran College, in response to Prof. Theodore Hartwig’s article on hermeneutics:]

Finally an *historian* speaks. Form-wise, I found his essay’s lack of citations enervating. It drove me nuts. Clear citations were not the scholarly norm up through the 19th century (von Ranke seldom used them), on into the 20th century (especially in the WELS—I had profs like that), and now apparently the 21st century (Hartwig). Ugh. And I respect him so much.

More importantly, content-wise, I agree with him. Context must be stressed, not just grammar. That’s the historian speaking. Many shy away from this because it’s harder to deal with the historical context than the grammar or just looking up words. I’ve thought of the problem this way: We (in WELS) *say* we take historical context into account besides grammar; but we limit it to a few things—determining authorship (too often a foregone conclusion for us), the vaguely historical setting, the use of words at that time. We don’t carry the context far enough, into behind-the-scenes thought patterns of that time, the wider influences (often pagan) acting *on* the author, not just how he reacts *to* them, the whole *Sitz im Leben* thing.

Regarding the two methods of interpretation of Scripture that he presents, I wouldn’t subscribe to either one as it stands. I really do have to read each document *in toto*, which, of course, he’s unable to give lest he thereby reveal the authors (I’ve got my suspicions about who they are). Depending only on his summaries, even if I believe (as I do) that

they're fair, just isn't good enough for me. But I incline toward the latter method. And as he kindly and fairly says, the issue isn't doctrinal with one true and the other false; it's hermeneutical.

I've also thought to myself, since Seminary days, that another adjective was needed before "interpretation": Literary. We need a "grammatical-historical-literary" interpretation. The writers of Scripture were, after all, *writers*, not just grammarians or historians. With "literary" I'm not thinking only about word choices. I'm thinking about everything that makes a writer a writer, a quality hard to express, but which includes bias, unique insight, projection of mood, a certain sense of things. Like painters and other artists, writers go after their feelings. It isn't just a "barn" anymore. It isn't just a "person" anymore. It's an elusive feeling a writer gets from looking at an object and trying to communicate that personal feeling to others. Since "literary" in my sense is hard to explain, and even harder for most people to understand, since they've never experienced it, it usually isn't even thought of.

On the whole, I applaud Hartwig. He's pointed out a dangerous imbalance in our WELS biblical interpretation, and he's done so courageously, putting his reputation on the line. Since he has fought the good fight successfully for so many years, our synod should pay attention to him.

This would include [Prof.] Wendland. He's so right when he stresses the need for historical context as well as grammar in interpretation. He points out so clearly the need for balance (216). Then he turns right around and so wrongly elevates grammar over history (217). (May I add, he refers to the "grammatical/literary context" of the writers (223), but I think he means just word choice, not "literary" as I tried to explain above.)

Thank you for sending me Hartwig's article. I imagine it provoked comments, and I'm looking forward to reading them.

Rev. Dr. James Kiecker

John,

Good question about how evangelistic are we. Too often we have lost sight of why we exist as individual congregations and as a church body. As a result we don't know why we are here or what we are about. It's sad. As a pastor with God's help we have tried here at St. Mark's to keep before our people that we are here to reach the lost and help those in the faith grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. The devil continually tries to divert our attention to other matters and when that happens we can see our adult confirmations drop and we start losing sight of our mission and purpose.

Rev. Jim Werner
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Watertown, Wisconsin

Dear John,

1. During my brief excursion (thanks to Gary) [Greenfield] into social research, I think I learned one thing. Researchers can usually prove their hypotheses, for whatever reason. The valuable information comes from research that contradicts the hypothesis.

2. A 30-year review of Siloah's ministry will show that large numbers of adults joined through the school, for whatever reasons. More on that if you want it.

3. Inner-city choice schools are growing in enrollment, contrary to the trend, but we are struggling to bring choice families into the congregation, I'm not so sure about Risen Savior, St. Phillip Christ-St. Peter's and Garden Homes, but St. Marcus and Siloah for sure.

For whatever that may be worth.

With love in Christ,

Rev. Rolfe Westendorf
Siloah Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, Wisconsin