



A Decade of *Word & World*

Ten years ago the faculty at Luther Northwestern Seminary asked itself if there was a need for a new journal of theology on the American scene. They decided there was; so 1990 marks the tenth anniversary of *Word & World*.

Why this journal? I suppose at one level it reflects nothing more (though nothing less) than the strong desire of theologians to write, to communicate, to teach, to bear witness, to analyze, to review, to make contact. That may be enough. My high school English teacher said the first requirement for a writer was to “develop the urge to communicate.” Theologians don’t seem to have a lot of difficulty with this. The reason may be as simple as the evangelical impulse of the redeemed: “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise” (Ps 51:15); or it may be as complex as the inherent connection between language and being human, between naming and being in the image of God: “The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Gen 2:20).

So, *a* journal seems needed. But writing can happen anywhere. Why *this* journal? The answer to that question lies in our title and our subtitle.

Word & World we call ourselves, and we mean to take the title seriously. So what does the “and” mean? One could surely make a case—say, from the prologue to the gospel of John—for the Word *in* the world. Second Isaiah would help us argue for a Word *to* the world (cf. Isa 45:22-23). But our “and” seems to be more open, to have less of an agenda. Have we lost our nerve? I think not. We are, in fact, quite willing for the conversation with the world to be open. We want to learn as well as teach. We want to play and speculate as well as argue and indoctrinate. Things go both ways across an “and”—which is the way we want it. We will publish articles that sound very Lutheran (some of them in this issue, focusing as it does on catechism). But we will also publish articles by folks outside our tradition, aiming to learn what they have to teach us about a creation which we know is larger and more wonderful than our own particular perception of it.

But, of course, we do have a point of view. Those who work on this journal are, for the most part, Lutheran Christian theologians, whose “agenda” shows up in our subtitle: “Theology for Christian Ministry.” Now a “for” is precisely not an “and.” A “for” has direction, *telos*, intentionality. Just as the gospel is finally *for* the world, so, we believe, Christian theology is *for* ministry. Theology may sometimes deal with abstractions, but it will not remain abstract; it may step back from the

context to reflect and to analyze, but it is always contextual; it may be at home in a seminary, but never in an ivory tower.

This connection may need to be asserted anew these days, and with vigor. In a number of

recent ecclesiastical meetings, I have heard that theology is the enemy of what needs to be done out there, that it is a white man's game, incapable of addressing the real world; I have been told that speaking of the gospel is a western "method" that avoids the real issues, that theology is a quaint relic of the medieval church. Undoubtedly, such talk needs to be heard by theologians as a word of judgment, as a challenge to bring the excitement and liberation of theological understanding into the contemporary arena; but such harsh criticisms of theology need also to be recognized as voices of impoverishment, issuing from people who have apparently never known the exhilarating moment when "the heart sings unbidden" (C. S. Lewis, "Introduction" to *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* [London: A. R. Mowbray, 1953] 8) because of a *theological* insight—an insight which is not merely cerebral (though the God who gave us big brains knows there's nothing wrong with being cerebral), but is exhilarating because it touches our whole selves and our whole world, because it connects, because it is true and therefore freeing. Theology is for ministry, it is for the church, it is for human beings, it is for life. Our task is to speak and write as though we believe that—because we do.

In observance of this tenth year, we have asked four well-known theologians to reflect for us on how the context of the church and its ministry has affected their work. What have been the connections between Word and world in their experience? How has their theology been done *for* ministry? One of these articles will appear as a personal perspective in each of the four issues of Volume 10 (1990).

We begin with *Claus Westermann's* contribution, "Experience in the Church and the Work of Theology." Readers may be surprised to find a second piece from Westermann in as many issues. So were we. This one was planned long in advance; the essay in the last issue ("The Human in the Old Testament") came as a serendipitous opportunity we couldn't pass up. In any event, we welcome both contributions, because (as we said last fall) Professor Westermann's work has so well exemplified our own interest in "Theology for Christian Ministry." Those familiar with Westermann's work will be delighted to hear him describe how so many of the themes he has worked at diligently over the years (e.g., creation, praise and lament, blessing and saving) grew directly out of his observations and experiences in the life of the church, indeed, out of life at its edges during the Third Reich and in the difficult post-war years. Westermann's essay kicks off this series in fine fashion.

In the succeeding issues we will hear *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, *Douglas John Hall*, and *Elizabeth Achtemeier* address this same theme. We are grateful for their willingness to participate in this observance of our tenth anniversary and very pleased to be able to present their work to our readers.

F.J.G.