

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenti

Many, many years ago a very bright Christian theologian by the name of Prosper, whose life spanned the years of 390 to 455 Anno Domini, lived in a town named Aquitaine. Aquitaine is located in the south-western part of metropolitan France, along the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees mountain range on the border with Spain.

He was a Christian writer and a disciple (student) of St. Augustine who was a convert to Christianity and a prolific writer.

Prosper of Aquitaine is credited with a truthful maxim often seen today written in Latin; *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, which is loosely translated as “the law of prayer is the law of belief.”

What this means is; how you pray will be a reflection of how you believe. Stated conversely, your beliefs about God and salvation will be reflected in the way you pray.

I once illustrated this truthful maxim to one of my Bible Studies. I had the left half of the class get together and compose a prayer without using any of the things they knew of the Bible or of Christianity. They were not allowed to use biblical words, nor biblical thoughts. The right half of the class could write their prayer using whatever they knew of Christianity and the bible.

As expected those on the left wrote their prayers to the Great Spirit, or the man above, (interestingly though, it was the man above, not the woman above!) and some to Gaia. Their petitions included health, prosperity, a long life, all things which pertain to life as they live it. Actually now that I think about it, their prayers all flowed from the First Article of the Creed!

The right half of the class addressed their prayer to the Triune God, also asking for things pertaining to earthly life but also to the up building of their faith that they might be preserved unto Eternal life. They also mentioned the all-availing sacrifice of their Savior Jesus Christ. And they finished their prayer in the Name of Jesus. One person even wrote out the Lord’s Prayer! These people utilized mainly the 2nd and 3rd Articles of the Creed.

It was a simplistic exercise, but it illustrated for them that the law of prayer is the law of belief. How and what you believe will affect the language and content of how you pray and what you say.

We have another saying in our contemporary language that is akin to *Lex orandi, Lex Credendi* and that is; “If it looks like a duck, and walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.”

This saying of Prosper of Aquitaine is theologically profound and extremely relevant for our day and age. Not too many years ago a Lutheran, when traveling on vacation or a business trip could just about walk into any Lutheran Church in the Missouri Synod and feel comfortable, as the church he was visiting was using a form of the Liturgy he would be familiar with.

However those days are long gone now and who knows where it will all end up. Missouri Synod Churches are just as likely to look and sound just like Joel Osteen's style of worship. The pastors of many of these Churches even look just like Joel Osteen all dressed up in suit and tie, and eschewing the pulpit in favor of walking amongst the people in a back and forth manner.

The content of the sermons you hear are pretty much the same type of content you could hear at just about any Baptist or Reformed Church. The "worship centers" look nothing like the traditional worship space of other LCMS churches. They look like auditoriums and gymnasiums. Consider this also though; it is amazing theological insight that even the style of architecture is a result of what you believe! Now this is also pretty amazing because the content of the "sermon" that is preached in these types of churches is also about building up your spiritual muscles (as in a gymnasium!) so that you can be a strong Christian for Jesus out there in the world during the course of the week.

So the sermon is a gymnasium sermon designed to strengthen your spiritual muscles. Consequently the message that is preached is something along the line of, "now that you have been saved by Jesus this is how you should be living your life!" And the end result of this type of preaching tends to lead you to a sort of >progressive justification or a progressive sanctification." You are left with the understanding that every day of your life ought to become better spiritually than the last one. It is sort of interesting to me, as an aside that the popular phrase of the Navy Seals is, "*Your best day was yesterday!*" A saying which is, I think, more in line with the Christian message of taking up your cross and following Jesus.

Either conclusion, you would agree, is nothing but law: law that you are unable to fulfill, "for all your works are as filthy rags." They merit you nothing. **For the best life you could possible live in obedience to God according to His perfect standard of His Holy Law is still, when all is said and done, a damnable life!**

The type of preaching and the contemporary praise songs that are sung all have to do with our obedience. This would be obedience either in gratitude to the Lord, or obedience for the purpose of staying on God's good side. Whichever one it becomes you will be led to one of two conclusions, both of which will be disastrous to your faith. One, you will either become as a Pharisee, thinking that you are not doing such a bad job after all. Especially compared to other Christians who are not doing as well as you are doing. Or two, you will become so despondent due to the fact that you somehow cannot live up to the standards that are being preached about or the songs which are being sung. You won't have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in your heart nor will you be able to maintain the mountaintop style of faith that is being spoken of. The result being that you may come to the conclusion that you must not be a Christian at all. You will find that climbing Jacob's ladder going higher and higher, is an impossible task.

Way back when I was in the seminary, the President of the Seminary, Dr. Robert Preus had the opportunity to sit down with the then President of our Synod, Dr. Alvin Barry. Dr. Preus informed Dr. Barry that the Church Growth Movement (hereafter referred to as CGM) with its emphasis on meeting the felt needs of the un-churched would be the biggest theological danger and disaster the LCMS would face in years to come. His words were very prophetic. For whether you as a layman, or you as a Pastor, believe this or not, it is not at all a stretch to say that if you buy into this style of contemporary worship and preaching you stand a very

good chance of losing your faith. “Lex orandi; lex credendi.” How and what you pray is a reflection of what you believe!

Some years ago I was visiting my home church in Chesterton, Indiana. The service was liturgical and traditional using T.L.H., (The Lutheran Hymnal) page 15 for the Divine Service. In attendance at that service was a couple who had once belonged to St. Paul Lutheran Church when my family and I were members prior to my attending the Seminary at Ft. Wayne. When we were all members there at St. Paul, we were the best of friends. During the coffee between services this couple who had once belonged told us a little about their new Lutheran church in Indianapolis. It utilized the contemporary worship services. The man (who used to be an elder along with me at St. Paul) was quick to inform me that even though they were using this type of Contemporary Worship the theology of their church was still decidedly Lutheran in their theology. I strongly disagreed, but unfortunately I did not have the time necessary to explain the theological facts behind my assertion. (As you pray so you believe.) How grateful I was that day to the Pastor of my home congregation for having the courage to preach Christ and Him Crucified. **For the goal of the Gospel** is stated perfectly in the Creed; “Who for us and our Salvation, came down from Heaven!” As a point in fact; the Gospel is our Salvation!

Many of my contemporary Pastors in the ministry have bought in to the CGM lock, stock and barrel. They have become obsessed with repetitious emotionally structured praise music, which is about how much we love, love, love, love Jesus. They preach their law oriented sermons while walking around the sanctuary dressed in their suits and ties, instead of from a pulpit and using traditional vestments. They have completely ignored the Constitutional Requirement of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, as a regulation of membership in the LCMS, that only doctrinally accepted hymnals and catechisms be used in LCMS churches. The songs they have their congregations sing are not at all theological proclamations of Law and Gospel, which are actually able to bring people to faith and to save them!!! If you study the content of the words of these praise songs, they are about as shallow as the South Platte River. The doctrinal content these praise songs espouse is sophomoric and theologically vacuous. They have the same words repeated six or seven times in each song, mostly about how much we love Jesus, and how we are going to give Him our hearts and our lives.

They are more suited to three and four year olds, or perhaps even that is a stretch, because bad theology is just as injurious to three and four year olds as to the elderly.

Instead of the Praise songs that espouse how we need to give our hearts to Jesus, (which by the way, Jesus says of our hearts that every manner of evil flows from them, and what a rotten, stinky gift that would be to give your heart to the Savior of the world!), perhaps we ought to return to sermons and hymns that enable people who are trying in their lives to fight the good fight of faith standing firm in the faith that they may be able to resist the trickeries of the evil one. These are God’s dearest people who correctly understand that the life of the Christian will be a life both of suffering, (“If any would follow after Me, he must take up his cross and follow me”) and also a life of deep and sometimes quiet joy, by having the comfort of Christ (forgiveness) flow over into our lives. (2 Cor. 1:3-5)

The messages that are being preached by these supposedly Lutheran Pastors as they wander around the sanctuary have more to do with how you live your life for Jesus rather than how Jesus lived His perfect life for you. And as a result of His perfectly keeping the law of God, for

the sake of Jesus Christ, God has imputed His righteousness to you.

The more this message of obedience to the law is preached; whether before or after salvation, the more they look and sound just like so many Baptist Preachers of the Reformed theological camp. (Lex orandi; Lex Credendi)

And if that weren't awful enough some of the sermons I've heard have nothing to do with sin and grace. Rather they are about managing your time and money, or how to be a good dad or mom, how to be a good steward of your resources or other such nonsense. Have a forty day of purpose plan for yourself. Be a promise keeper. Do these twelve steps. Etc. Etc. In the words of one of my favorite contemporary songs, **"And the beat goes on. And the beat goes on. Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain, la de da de de, la de da de da."**

Now we have the one of the newest fads in the LCMS circles. The Transforming Church Network program or T.C.N. Demographic studies show that our congregations are growing elderly and therefore smaller as the elderly are carried off to the Church Triumphant, (Where I guarantee there are no contemporary Praise Songs, Except maybe the Sanctus, which is always contemporary,) and so we just have to do something to transform these ageing congregations in order to appeal to a younger generation. A younger generation I might add that has been inundated by Popular Culture which is both consumer and entertainment oriented. So old statues, old sanctuaries, old music, and old liturgy have got to go. Pastors need to be sent back to school (preferably a school called Pastoral Leadership Institute) to learn how to become the cheerleaders or leaders or Chief Executive Officers of their congregations that they might retrain their congregations to understand that the biblical understanding of the word ministry no longer means the Ministry of Word and Sacraments but is now a ministry that the members themselves must perform. They learn the various spiritual gifts they possess from taking a Spiritual gift inventory so they can get busy doing the work of their various ministries in order to bring the new younger people in to the church by meeting their felt needs. So now churches have a valet ministry to park the cars, or a Starbucks franchise for the narthex. (Probably soon to be called the skinny venti low fat caramel macchiato Ministry!)

In short Prosper of Aquitaine was exactly correct. The reason these "Lutheran pastors" pray the way they do, preach the way they do, sing the songs of praise music the way they do, instead of the doctrinally pure hymns of historic Christianity which are law and Gospel, (which the Holy Spirit uses to work faith when and where He wills,) and the reason they dress in their suits and ties is because their theology has become the same as the Reformed. In short they have become Reformed Theologians on the order of Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday or Billy Graham and his heir apparent. In all fairness to them though, they still have the Sacraments, however this simply makes them sacramental Baptists. This is a term that has been coined by someone else other than myself but aptly describes them anyway.

Let me give you an illustration on this topic. Every now and again I take a vacation to my home town in Indiana where all of my brothers and sisters reside. Usually my wife and I stay with my younger brother. He and his family have affiliated themselves with the Evangelical Free Churches. So when it is time to pray over our meals it is either he or I who are looked upon to say the prayer. This is how he prays:

*Dear, Jesus (Sigh) we **just** want to thank you for all the blessings You give us and we **just***

thank you to be able to have Joe and Nancy here with us. We just want to thank you for all of the blessings you have given us and bless all of us; in Jesus's Name. Amen.

And sometimes he offers to let me say the prayer and this is how I pray:

The eyes of all look to You, oh Lord, You open Your hand and You satisfy the desires of every living thing. Bless us, oh Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One time my brother said to me after I prayed, "Your prayers sound like they come right from the Bible!" I answered him saying, "So what's your point?" Lex Orandi; Lex Credendi. Prosper of Aquitaine was absolutely correct!

So if nothing else my brother recognized that there was something very different when he compared his table prayer to mine. The reason they were different was because our theology was different.

One more final illustration on this topic. It is not just how you pray that reflects what you believe but it can also be said how you believe can affect how you speak about Christianity. My brother, and I were having a conversation recently about one of his friends who used to be sort of a reprobate but as he put it; now he has a personal relationship with Jesus. I replied, "You mean to say that Jesus has a personal relationship with your friend, don't you? He related this conversation to his wife who was quick to point out that both statements were correct.

As a point of fact however the statement "I have a personal relationship with Jesus" is not a Christian statement at all. I will even go so far as to state that the above statement actually reflects that the person saying it is no Christian if he truly believes the words he has spoken.

Any statement concerning the relationship of a person with Jesus, if it starts out with the word "I" as the subject of the sentence, is decidedly not a statement of Christianity. The use of "I" as the subject of the sentence indicates that this individual making the statement has initiated the relationship with Jesus. This would make their conversion a work which is done by them. The Bible on the other hand makes plain that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is initiated by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of God's sacred Word.

So this is a rule of thumb especially if you are a Lutheran who is visiting another church or a member of a Lutheran church and there is a projection screen in the sanctuary or the Pastor is playing a guitar for the praise music, or there is a space somewhere in the sanctuary reserved for the "praise band," or the sanctuary can easily be converted to a gymnasium, be afraid, be very afraid. For it is not a stretch to say that your faith is in danger.

Take seriously the words of Prosper of Aquitaine; The law of prayer is the law of belief!