
The Holy Spirit's Strange Witness: Luther's Countercultural Narratives for the Church in North America

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Introduction

What does the Christian life look like in a North American cultural milieu consumed by therapeutic individualism, ethnocentric nationalism, and tribal thinking? In this essay, I explore insights from three of the Reformer Martin Luther's writings that invite us to think, feel, and act in ways that are at odds with common attitudes and ways of thinking among North Americans today. I argue that Luther's writings can be framed pneumatologically as stories of the Holy Spirit's strange witness through the church for today. When God's people appreciate, pray for, and embody the Holy Spirit's strange witness in their lives, they stand out from the crowd, opening a door for others to ask further questions about the church and perhaps consider their own lives anew in view of the Christian story.

Beyond the therapeutic: The Spirit's strange witness in community

In *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Philip Rieff argued that since the rise of late modernity a shift has taken place in the Western view of culture from a focus on religion as belief to religion as feeling. As he put it, "Religious man was born to be saved; psychological man is born to be pleased. The difference was established long ago, when 'I believe,' the city of the ascetic, lost precedence to 'one feels,' the caveat of the therapeutic."¹ Before modernity, the subject of faith was the religious person who lived his life in reference to an external authority and in terms of accountability to a moral code, creeds, and institutions that channeled one's passions in a communal direction. Since late modernity, the psychological person lives in reference to her own internal self-realization and well-being and thus according to that which makes each individual feel good inside.

In their study of North American youth's attitudes toward spirituality, Smith and Denton found out that the dominant narrative shaping youth's thinking and life, which they referred to as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), involved a similar shift. They discovered that the youth did not approach "[r]eligion as an external authority or tradition" shaping their thinking and

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behavior, but instead tended to see faith and spirituality as "[t]herapeutic individualists" who "seek out religious and spiritual practices, feelings, and experiences that satisfy their own subjectively defined needs and wants."² The claim that "the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself" sums up a typical response heard in interviews.³

Although Gen-Xers and millennials inherited the therapeutic cultural worldview from their Boomer parents, they also appear open to the idea that there is more to life than one's own personal happiness. While they still see spirituality in terms of the therapeutic, there is a certain discontent among these adults with this individualistic view of reality. This dissatisfaction is reflected partly in the Gen-Xers' hunger for community in an age of isolation and the millennials' interest in worthy social causes to live by.⁴

2. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 175.

3. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.

4. In contrast to their predecessors' therapeutic "search for fulfillment," Gen Xers reclaimed the importance of community and Christ's concern for the disadvantaged. See Haydn Shaw and Ginger Kolbaba,

1. Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966; repr., 1987), 24–25.

For “Nones” (religiously unaffiliated) in either of these groups, there is an interest in a spirituality without institutional religion, but also and paradoxically an interest in institutions that promote and nurture community and belonging and are involved in social causes that foster justice for vulnerable neighbors.⁵

What countercultural narrative from Luther can help us to embody a more generous communal way of life in North America today? How might such a narrative be interpreted pneumatologically as the Spirit's strange witness in a world of therapeutic individualism? In the animated film *Red Boots for Christmas*, Hans the shoemaker is a grinchy, Scrooge-like character who has lost the spirit of Christmas. Unexpectedly, Hans is visited by an angel who announces to him that God is coming to visit him on Christmas. To get ready for the visitation, Hans goes around town looking for the perfect gift for God. Finding none that satisfied him, he decides to ask Gretchen, a poor and pious Christian woman in town, for advice on what she would give God for Christmas if she had the opportunity. Gretchen responds: “I would give him what I give him every day: My sin for his pardon, my weakness for his strength, my sorrow for his joy.”⁶

In simple yet profound words, Gretchen verbalizes Luther's “gracious exchange” justification (or righteousness of faith) metaphor according to which Christ takes our unrighteousness upon himself and communicates his righteousness to us. In *The Blessed Sacrament of the True Body and Blood of Christ* (1519), Luther extends the metaphor to describe the spiritual life as a communion between saints that follows from their communion with Christ in his body and blood. The church's “use” of Communion as a “sacrament of love” signifies an interdependent view of life,⁷ but the sacrament also creates and sustains a community of gracious exchanges where Christians share each other's burdens and gifts.⁸ Luther calls Christians to trust in God's promises of communion and community: “Then do not doubt that you have what the sacrament signifies, that is, be certain that Christ and all his saints are coming to you with all their virtues, sufferings, and mercies, to live, work, suffer, and die with you, and that they desire to be

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wholly yours, having all things in common with you.”⁹ Luther contrasts this communal and interdependent vision of life together with the posture of the “self-seeking person,” who only benefits from the blessings of fellowship but does not share such gifts with others, that is, the selfish person who “would gladly share in the profits but not in the costs” of fellowship.¹⁰

Luther's spiritual vision of communion is based on Paul's exhortation to the Galatians to “bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2), which in the immediate context of the letter offers God's people a concrete way to embody “the fruit of the Spirit” (cf. Gal 5:22–24). Bearing each other's burdens embodies life in the Spirit, giving us a picture of what it means to live by Paul's exhortation, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). The Holy Spirit habituates God's people to become a strange yet winsome community of gracious exchanges in a highly individualistic society, shaping them to become a more generous, neighbor-oriented community in the world. Such habituation in the Spirit entails a move from a way of life that puts a high premium on self-gratification to a sacrificial form of life that involves sharing our lives, struggles, and gifts with each other in good and tough times.

Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, And the Future Is Bright (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 87–88.

5. “Community does not seem to have the great attraction it once did. Instead, there has been a great seismic shift. Today it is cause that arrests the attention of the world.” James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2014), 101.

6. Sheryl Scarborough, Kayte Kuch, Allen Admire, et al. *Red Boots for Christmas* (1985), accessed January 4, 2026, <https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=red+boots+for+christmas&mid=C35557EC536AD6FB7347C35557EC536AD6FB7347&FORM=VIRE>.

7. Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament*, LW 35:54.

8. Luther laments the loss of the apostolic church's vision of communion in his day: “Christians cared for one another, supported one another, sympathized with one another, bore one another's burdens and affliction. This has all disappeared, and now there remain only the masses and the many who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies.” Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament*, LW 35:57.

9. LW 35:61.

10. LW 35:57; “They will not help the poor, put up with sinners, care for the sorrowing, suffer with the suffering, intercede for others, defend the truth, and at the risk of [their own] life, property, and honor seek the betterment of the church and of all Christians.” Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament*, LW 35:57.

As Kenda Creasy Dean rightly observes: “Imitating Christ makes people lay down their wallets, their reputations, their lives for the sake of others, which is why parents rightly fear it for their children. The cult of nice is so much safer; God is friendly and predictable, offering little and asking for less.”¹¹ In this sacrificial community of the Spirit, the selfish sinner in all of us learns to die to self to make room for our neighbors. We may call this strange witness of the Spirit in and through the church a “spirituality of descent,” that is, a unique form of discipleship in the world in which God’s people “do not seek a higher spirituality somewhere up there in the heavens, but rather come down to earth and get their hands dirty in the messiness of life to share in its sufferings and joys with others.”¹²

Beyond nationalism: The Spirit’s strange witness in hospitality

In North America, nationalism comes in many shapes and forms. The label “Christian nationalism,” in particular, includes a spectrum of increasingly popular positions ranging from believers who do not want an absolute separation between church and state (a separation that, for instance, would not allow for prayer in schools) to those who want the United States to be run by Christians according to God’s laws (including those who, if needed, will use force to do so).¹³ At its most basic level, Christian nationalism equates and thus confuses Christian identity with American identity, positing that there is a political system or set of political ideas that believers must adhere to in the name of Christ for God to bless the nation. Such a conflation of identities becomes problematic when it makes the state and its enforcement apparatus into some version of church, thereby usurping the church’s unique mission in the world to proclaim the Gospel and hurting the church’s credible witness to Christ to all people without distinction in a divided world. The church should be concerned with politics, but from the perspective of her own religious virtues. God’s people must exercise Christian discipleship in the world by drawing from their own biblical and theological resources rather than by becoming domesticated as an instrument of state power.¹⁴

11. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40.

12. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 136.

13. See Molly Olmstead, “‘Christian Nationalism’ Used to Be Taboo. Now It’s All the Rage,” *Slate.com*, 5 August 2022, accessed January 4, 2026, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/08/christian-nationalist-identity-marjorie-taylor-greene.html>.

14. “The recovery of the Thomist idea of religion as a virtue is crucial to the Church’s resistance to State discipline.... Christian ‘political ethics,’ therefore, is inseparable from an account of how virtues such as religion and peaceableness are produced and reproduced in the habitual practices of the Church. Christian ‘politics’ cannot be the pursuit of influence over the powers, but rather a question of what kind of community disciplines we need to produce people of peace capable of speaking truth to power.” William T. Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong

A conflation of American and Christian identities becomes a messy proposition when Christians use power to advance the political aim of protecting a monolithic (not to mention, questionable and contested) view of “true” American Christian identity (for example, Anglo and Protestant). Such use of power to push a narrow political agenda inevitably ends up excluding neighbors who are seen as “dissidents and minorities” because they do not fit the paradigm of the American Christian.

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Peter Meilaender has argued that, although there is a place for discussions about immigration law and policy that account for the distinction between citizens and foreign nationals in nation states, there are morally compelling reasons such as the status of refugees and family unity that put a limit on the rights of sovereign states.¹⁷ Even though Meilaender holds a communitarian view of life that gives priority to citizens over foreigners, he also proposes

Enough to Consume the House: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State,” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 1995): 415.

15. See Paul D. Miller, “What is Christian Nationalism?” *ChristianityToday.com*, 3 February 2021, accessed January 4, 2026, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html>.

16. Miller, “What is Christian Nationalism?”

17. Peter C. Meilaender, *Toward a Theory of Immigration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 174–183.

that undocumented immigrants “who have lived in this country for an extended period, starting families and putting down roots, at some point can no longer reasonably be regarded as outsiders. *De facto*, if not *de jure*, they are one of us.”¹⁸ Meilaender offers a nuanced communitarian approach to immigration that accounts for national identity without outrightly excluding immigrants as our neighbors. Having said that, a communitarian vision of life can still be susceptible to or co-opted into an ethnocentric approach to Christian nationalism that is ultimately inimical to the church's catholic identity and evangelical mission in the world.

What countercultural narrative from Luther can help us to embody a more hospitable way of life toward refugees and immigrants in North America today? How might such a narrative be interpreted pneumatologically as the Spirit's strange witness in a world under the lure of nationalism? In his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), Luther reflects on Abraham's hospitality to the three strangers at Mamre (Gen 18:1–8) at a time when exiles were fleeing into the lands of his Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous (1503–1554) due to religious persecution and other misfortunes. Exalting Abraham as “a beautiful moral example of hospitality,”¹⁹ Luther reminds God's people that “there is hospitality wherever the church is.”²⁰ Luther raises hospitality to a mark of the church, an external sign whereby the church can be recognized as a welcoming community of persecuted and suffering exiles in a harsh and inhospitable world. He exhorts the church to embody the patriarch's example and thus her identity as a hospitable people: “Hence, if we want to be Christians, let our homes be open to exiles, and let us assist and refresh them.”²¹ The church is the house of Abraham in the world.²²

Given the indissoluble nexus of faith and good works in Luther's vision of the Christian life, the Reformer depicts Abraham as both “a father of faith” and “a father of good works . . . a most beautiful example of love, gentleness, kindness, and all virtues.”²³ Justification and sanctification go hand in hand in the life of Abraham, for “it is faith . . . that makes him so eager and ready” to welcome strangers.²⁴ When we see strangers through the “eyes of the flesh,” their “bodily appearance is a hindrance to us,” but when we see them with the “inner eyes of faith” we see that God himself is our true “Guest” as he “is coming” to us in his suffering saints.²⁵ Luther is especially critical of Christians who are apathetic to the plight of exiles, especially those who are their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The fact that we are slow to do these services and are either displeased or grumble when brethren arrive—

18. Peter C. Meilaender, “Immigration: Citizens and Strangers,” *First Things* 173 (May 2007): 12.

19. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, LW 3:177.

20. LW 3:178.

21. LW 3:180.

22. LW 3:188.

23. LW 3:185.

24. LW 3:195.

25. LW 3:196.

In a context where an ethnocentric view of American nationalism threatens to redefine or co-opt what it means to be a Christian, a catechesis of hospitality amid exiles, who are often seen with suspicion and disdain, will highlight how the hand of welcome is extended to people beyond those with whom we share bonds of nationhood and citizenship.

these are signs of a faith which, if not altogether dead, is nevertheless asleep and very lazy. Therefore these examples must be put before the churches and carefully impressed, lest we pay the penalties of ingratitude. . . .²⁶

Luther's catechesis on Abraham's hospitality seeks to form Christians in the virtue of hospitality. Because Christians in this life are simultaneously just (saint) and sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*), the catechist does not take for granted the real struggle between the new creature who lives by faith and the sinful flesh that still hangs on to us in this present age. When Luther distinguishes between two ways of seeing strangers, he is referring to two visions of life that are in opposition to each other. The contrast between “eyes of the flesh” and “inner eyes of faith” invites us to frame attitudes, dispositions, speech, and actions in relation to exiles in terms of the struggle between the sinful flesh and the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

From a pneumatological perspective, we can see Luther's instruction on the example of Abraham as a means of spiritual formation, of shaping the church in virtues that are not always readily evident even among God's people. Even though Christians will often disagree about the justice, fairness, or adequacy of the immigration laws and policies of a nation, the metaphor of the church as the house of Abraham reminds God's people of their catholic identity and evangelical mission among migrants. This spiritual identity serves as a lasting value and moral compass to navigate life in an ever-changing world of government laws and popular opinions about refugees and immigrants. More important, in a context where an ethnocentric view of American nationalism threatens to redefine or co-opt what it means to be a Christian, a catechesis of hospitality amid exiles, who are often seen with suspicion and disdain, will highlight how the hand of welcome is extended to people beyond those with whom we share bonds of nationhood and citizenship.

26. LW 3:196.

To the example of Abraham, we can add the example of deacon and evangelist Philip who by the power of the Holy Spirit embodies the church's mission to peoples of all languages, ethnicities, and nations—Greek-speaking Jewish widows (Acts 6:1–6), Samaritans (Acts 8:4–8), and an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). The spiritual virtue of hospitality grounded in a healthy missional impulse and a generous catholicity toward migrants from all the nations becomes a strange yet powerful countercultural witness of the Spirit in a world where refugees (especially from Muslim countries) and undocumented immigrants (especially from Mexico) are seen by some as threats to the nation state instead of neighbors for whom Christ died and rose again. The church's life of hospitality can challenge unhealthy nationalistic impulses among Christians and engender a healthy cosmopolitanism that embraces Christian identity as a universal reality that includes fellow countrymen and women but also transcends the boundaries of nation states.

Beyond tribalism: The Spirit's strange witness in loving the unlovable

In his book *How To Think*, Alan Jacobs, argues that our deepest political divisions arise from simplistic thinking and that one of the main obstacles preventing critical thinking lies in our desire to belong to a tribe where one's biases are always confirmed and never challenged. Social media has exacerbated this tribalism, which in its worst form not only cancels people with opposing views but constructs them as enemies. As a Christian working in academia who had to navigate "mutual suspicion" and animosity between "evangelical Christians" and "secular academics," Jacobs laments that "everyone today seems to have an RCO [*repugnant cultural other*], and everyone's RCO is on social media somewhere."²⁷ He adds that this state of affairs leads to "a profoundly unhealthy situation . . . because it prevents us from recognizing others as our neighbors."²⁸

In a Facebook world where "like" likes "like," Christians are not immune and at times actively partake in tribal thinking and talk. The need for social acceptance or justification by one's tribe provides instant acceptance but prevents sustained dialogue across the aisle.²⁹ Tribalism stifles deeply listening to others, learning from them, finding common ground on issues, and working together to solve them whenever possible. It is not uncommon for people with the same or similar ideas, interests, language, aesthetic tastes, ethnocultural backgrounds and other common traits to enjoy each other's company. There is a legitimate place for the love of affinity, which means having friends who are like us in significant ways. Nevertheless, tribal thinking promotes the love of affinity

27. Alan Jacobs, *How To Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 27.

28. Jacobs, *How To Think*, 27.

29. "Why would people ever think, when thinking deprives them of 'the pleasure or sharing an attitude one knows is socially approved'—especially in an online environment where the social approval of one's attitudes is so much easier to acquire, in the currency of likes, faves, followers, and friends?" Jacobs, *How To Think*, 12.

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in an unhealthy way that excludes people who are unlike us from becoming a part of the community. At its worst, tribal thinking turns neighbors who are not like us into our enemies.

What countercultural narrative from Luther can help us to embody a cruciform way of life toward those whom we deem to be unlike us in North America today? How might such a narrative be interpreted pneumatologically as the Spirit's strange witness in a deeply divided society? In his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Luther distinguishes between two kinds of love, namely, human and divine love. Tuomo Mannermaa submits that this distinction not only serves as the hermeneutical key for understanding the Disputation but also "determines the basic structure of Luther's theology."³⁰ The distinction appears in thesis 28 of the Disputation: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."³¹ The basic argument in the second half of the thesis is that humans are naturally driven to love those who are attractive to them; therefore, they are drawn to and seek after people who have attributes that they either see in them or would like to see more fully in themselves—qualities that make humans desirable and lovable objects.³²

In Luther's day, scholastic theology drew an analogy between God and humans according to which humans reflect God as creatures made in God's image by loving people on the basis of their creaturely possession and expression of divine qualities such as truth and goodness.³³ Humans are similar to the God whom

30. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 9.

31. Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, LW 31:41.

32. See Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*, 10–11.

33. For an explanation of this analogical argument, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Beyond Facebook Love: Luther's Two Kinds of Love

they image in that both love others on the basis of their best qualities. Like every analogy, there is a degree of dissimilarity and discontinuity between both subjects because humans exercise this love imperfectly, while God does so perfectly. Yet the main idea remains: Like their Creator, humans love those whose qualities merit such love. If this were true, then, humans should love others in the same way God presumably loves them, that is, on the basis of qualities such as their good works, free choices, and right uses of reason—the very qualities Luther condemns in the Disputation as means to become righteous before God! Luther goes further, seeing the scholastic scheme not only as an affront to justification by faith apart from works, but also as a teaching detrimental to a proper view of sanctification.

By seeking “the true and good” in others, human love actually neglects “the poor and needy person,” and in doing so human love “judges according to appearances, is a respecter of persons, and judges according to that which can be seen, etc.”³⁴ For Luther, judging others on the basis of “that which can be seen” in them that is “the true and good” describes precisely the way a theologian of glory operates according to thesis 19 of the Disputation, that is to say, such a theologian “looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom 1:20].”³⁵ The “invisible things of God” Luther refers to in his explanation of thesis 19 are divine attributes such as “virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth.”³⁶ Significantly, these are the very attributes that theologians of glory wrongly seek in humans—attributes that presumably make people more attractive and desirable objects of love.

By contrast, the theologian of the cross does not look for qualities in people that make them lovable; instead, they make people lovable by bestowing upon them the same love God bestows upon sinners in Christ. As the first part of thesis 28 puts it, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.”³⁷ This is not the love of affinity, but the love of the cross, Christlike love. Like Christ, theologians of the cross do not look for the good in others to love them but love the unlovable by sharing the good with them. In the explanation to thesis 28 of the Disputation, Luther beautifully expresses this cruciform orientation toward the other by teaching that “sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved before they are attractive,” and that “the love of the cross . . . turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person.”³⁸

It is, however, unnatural to love as God loves us in Christ. The natural person prefers to love those whom he likes or wants to be like. Only the Holy Spirit can form sinners with tribal impulses

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to image Christlike divine love, the type of strange cruciform love that is often lacking in our day and age. The Holy Spirit alone transforms theologians of glory into theologians of the cross. Through the convicting (alien) and forgiving (proper) work of the Spirit, theologians of the cross see their fellow human beings “through suffering and the cross” (thesis 20), which means that, through daily repentance, the sinner in them dies with Christ on the cross to be raised with Christ to new life so that the new creature in them now suffers with and loves the unlovable with Christ’s love.³⁹ The Holy Spirit makes us theologians of the cross by turning our hearts toward the unlikely, unattractive, and unlovable people of our day. The Holy Spirit shapes us to move beyond Facebook love, to embody Christ’s love for the unattractive, repugnant cultural others of our day, so that we might see and embrace them not as enemies but as neighbors.

Conclusion

Years ago, Robert Wuthnow observed that North American neighbors were looking for a spirituality that was neither dweller-oriented nor seeker-oriented, but rather practice-oriented. Dweller spirituality is based on allegiance to institutions and traditions, over which religious leaders serve as “guardians”; in seeker spirituality, clergy serve as “shopkeepers” who meet their customers’ individual felt needs in a competitive religious marketplace.⁴⁰ Wuthnow argued that North American neighbors were looking for a more compelling “practice-oriented” spirituality oriented toward the cultivation and embodiment of spiritual disciplines around a narrative center giving coherence to life: “In such view, clergy must serve as models of spirituality, rather than as guardians or

and the Immigrant Other,” *Concordia Journal* 46, no. 4 (2000): 26–27.

34. LW 31:57–58.

35. LW 31:52.

36. LW 31:52.

37. LW 31:41.

38. LW 31:57.

39. In his explanation of thesis 4, Luther describes one of God’s “unattractive” works as his alien work of humbling the sinner in order to forgive him. This is the Spirit’s work of killing and making alive. See LW 31:44.

40. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 17.

shopkeepers.”⁴¹ What might such a “practice-oriented” spirituality around a narrative center look like in North America today?

In this essay, I have argued that Martin Luther's writings offer compelling narratives centered around countercultural images of life in the Spirit of Christ at odds with therapeutic, Christian nationalist, and tribal visions of life in North America. By drawing attention to the Holy Spirit's formative work in shaping the church as a community of gracious exchanges, the house of Abraham in the world, and theologians of the cross who love the unlovable, the Lutheran tradition can help pastors, lay leaders, and all believers appreciate, pray for, and embody the Holy Spirit's strange work of forming disciples in the likeness of Christ for such a times as ours. Indeed, the Holy Spirit's signature work is to be a witness to Christ. Because the Spirit also abides in and enlivens Christ's disciples in all ages, we too have the great gift of the imprint of the Spirit in our lives and the privilege to reflect his holiness by becoming witnesses to Christ's work in our own lives for the sake of the world. With courage and grace, the church embodies the Holy Spirit's strange yet compelling witness to Christ among North American neighbors today who might be curious about or hunger for community in an individualistic world, hospitality in a world of exiles looking for a country or a church to call home, and the love of the cross in a deeply divided world.

By drawing attention to the Holy Spirit's formative work in shaping the church as a community of gracious exchanges, the house of Abraham in the world, and theologians of the cross who love the unlovable, the Lutheran tradition can help pastors, lay leaders, and all believers appreciate, pray for, and embody the Holy Spirit's strange work of forming disciples in the likeness of Christ for such a times as ours.

41. Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 17.