

## Theme Articles

# Scenes and Means of Grace

By *Gilson Waldkoenig*

**Abstract:** The Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion—key means of grace according to the Lutheran tradition—take place in a web of earthly conditions whenever they are celebrated. Generating their own scenes of grace, the means of grace give voice, sense of place, and creativity where those are otherwise threatened. Other scenes of grace complement the means of grace, similarly bringing voice, place, and creativity in the face of environmental and social injustices. Martin Luther's affirmation of Christ's presence in creation, both in means of grace and throughout God's world, is a strategic and meaningful threshold for Christians to engage environment and justice while continuing to listen and look for the grace in Christ that feeds and shapes them.

**Key Terms:** ecotheology, grace, nature, environment, place, Luther

## An Appalachian Scene

Tucked into the ridges of Pennsylvania is a little-known gap in which stunning views from its heights match a soundtrack of cascading water in its depths. Whether climbing the rock slopes, or following the snaking streambed through hemlock, laurel, maple, and pine, the place is a threshold to recovering wilderness, like that which once covered the Appalachian landscape. Just a few miles down its paths, the birds, streams, and wind fill the soundscape; the rocky land makes paved roads seem remote; and the smell of ferns and fungi testifies to the slow but steady transformation that happens in forest ecosystems.

Resiliently re-forested over the last century, the place is unfortunately threatened anew. Mountaintop-removal mining and Marcellus Shale “fracking” are denuding and deforming the landscape in the region. Woods are shorn, mountains carved, and waterways ruined. Appalachia plunges

into another round of boom-and-bust exploitation, in cruel repetition of its past. Clear-cut in the nineteenth century, the oil, gas, and coal industries ruled the region thereafter. Communities of people imported to work mines, rigs, and mills became underemployed when powerful new extractive technologies required fewer workers; and manufacturing, like the energy wealth of Appalachia, was increasingly shipped overseas. Revival of the depressed economy is pitted against the ecological health of the land in each wave of industrial boom or bust.

Even where the land has suffered, I nevertheless have found wilderness sprouting from the barely healed scars of abused landscapes. One hopes it will come again after the current gas boom ebbs. A century of conservation and the preservation of vast stretches of state forest, national forest, and designated natural areas has restored some of the wild landscape. Appalachian wilderness is amazingly resilient and expresses a long-term resistance to human industrial abuse. Returning presence of ecosystemic communities and non-human neighbors

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restores a sense of place in spaces that had been treated as if they were disposable. A surprising kind of creativity cycles death into new life even in places where the soil has been depleted and the rich ecological cycles of forests have been seriously disturbed. A recovering wilderness landscape is a resiliently graceful scene.<sup>1</sup>

## **A Christian Story of Resilience**

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The central beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition stem from another story of resilience: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who never flees the flesh, nor abandons the earthly world.<sup>2</sup> For many Christians, Christ's persistence in earthly things is encountered through words and rituals, called the means of grace, which happen with earthly elements. Plain water from the earth's watersheds is united with the Word in baptism. Wine grown from the soil and wheat baked in fire join the Word in communion. Breath borrowed from the winds proclaims the living Word within the soundscape of this world. Those practices draw their elements from natural ecosystems and participate in them.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I want to underscore that the means of grace create their own scenes of grace, and the natural world presents scenes of grace that complement means of grace. Scenes and means of grace resound with voices, evoke sense of place, and unleash surprising creativity. This effort to highlight the relationship of scenes of grace with means of grace joins other efforts to relate traditional Christian theologies and practices to the environment, in hopes that Christians, centered in Christ and grace, may work for environmental justice, advocacy, and stewardship.<sup>4</sup> Observations in this article draw on two genres seldom brought together: the writings of naturalists, and traditional sources of Lutheran belief and practice. For Lutherans and other Christian readers, the association of natural scenes of grace with means of grace can be a lively way to revisit some important teachings about Christ's presence in creation that sometimes have been obscured in personalized and disembodied versions of faith.

After a section on definitions of scenes and means, I will look at how the means of grace create their own scenes of grace, and then how scenes of grace complement the means of grace. In each of those sections the categories of voice, place, and creativity describe the particular contours of scenes of grace. The conclusion notes some implications for theology and practice in relationship to environment, and some implications for those who would continue to engage Lutheran traditions with ecological concerns.

## **Scenes and Means: Definitions**

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Miles from Appalachia, on a mesa in Arizona, I once visited a poor but venerably historic village called Walpi. I gazed over a ring of prayer feathers that defined the boundary of the village, marking the mesa's sheer drop-off beyond. Inside the village I looked at a ladder rising out of a half-buried kiva, marking a mystical zone inside, forbidden to me and other outsiders. The prayer feathers tended the boundary against evil from outside; the kiva mediated careful interaction with the ambiguous spirit-world within. I perceived the basic human impulse to traipse, and sometimes to dance, over the boundaries of the profane and sacred, the unholy and the holy. Observers from a variety of disciplines have catalogued an amazing array of boundary-marking and boundary-crossing rituals, signs, and beliefs in many human cultures.

The feathers marking the edge of the mesa framed a scene of vastness beyond, and a scene of habitation within. Either aspect may be called a scene of grace. Princeton's lexical database of English gives nine definitions for "scene," including "the context and environment in which something is set."<sup>5</sup> A scene may be not only the background but the foreground, and the total conditions upholding an event, figure, or place. When we speak of scenery, we commonly diminish the complex web of conditions because the ambient sounds, temperature, time, light, and shadows overwhelm us. The uncharted edges of all that is happening at any given time defy our limited frames of

perception. And so a scene of grace is much more than scenery, evoking either the vastness surrounding a place, or the depth of potential meanings within a perimeter of habitation.<sup>6</sup>

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### *Lutheran “Means of Grace”*

The kiva at the mesa held a space for interaction between the habitations of spirit-dancers and the dwellings of people. That kind of intersection is differently configured in different traditions and cultures, but endemic to humankind. For Christianity there are moments identified to be particularly interactive between God and human beings, and they are called in some traditions “means of grace.” For example, the fifth article of the Augsburg Confession states that God gave “the gospel and the sacraments,” and through them, “as through means” or “instruments,” God gives the Holy Spirit and creates faith where and when God wills.<sup>7</sup> The seventh article then affirms the location of the church as the place where such means might be found. Lutherans favor these means of grace over a penitential system and other rituals, emphasizing that in these means one encounters the gift of grace in Christ Jesus. Looking to promises and commands of Christ in Scripture, Lutherans identify the means of grace as the Word, baptism, and communion.

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### *Dis-ease in Modern Thought*

For centuries Christians enjoyed easy affinity between scenes of grace in creation and means of grace specifically identified with Jesus Christ. A “two books” approach to revelation included the book of scripture and the book of nature, according to Augustine and other classic sources.<sup>8</sup> Modern thought and modern accomplishments reinforced a perception of separation between human mind and the matter around it; and some theologies separated noetic word from material world. While industry and technology reshaped human life, with many improvements for human well-being and enjoyment, it became traitorous in some circles to insist that the world was spirit-filled. Some Christian

theologies reworked ideas of faith to locate it primarily or exclusively in personal assent and individual destiny.

Industrialization respects no kiva that warns “enter these depths only with fear and trembling.” Modern conceit is to have dispelled the spirits of earth and sky, reshaping old boundaries between heights and depths to fit human-centered designs. But the wounded land parallels dis-ease within, and profound regret lurks just beneath recalcitrant industrialism. Having soared to self-designed heights, the drop-off to risks and objective problems frightens finite human beings. Mounting garbage and industrial waste, dumps in land and ocean, parts-per-million in the atmosphere and junk orbiting the earth, are marks of dis-ease and injustice. While many Christians cling to their faith for comfort about their personal destiny, the incongruence with the blight of the planet grows harder and harder to justify. Some crave a healed relationship with the earth, with each other, and with God. The means of grace engage that need, and we turn to them next.

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### **Means of Grace Create Scenes of Grace**

In Lutheran tradition there is robust affirmation of means of grace. Martin Luther argued vehemently that the means of grace were effective. Since they brought people to Christ’s presence, Luther taught, they could change miserable faithless sinners into believing and obedient saints. While Luther did not wish to put the means of grace above Christ himself, much less to turn them into quantifiable guarantees of benefits, Luther more boldly affirmed the externality of the sacraments and Word than did other reformers. The benefits came from a true presence of Christ outside the receivers, around which the church gathered. Even “a poor confused person” could “tell where such Christian holy people are to be found in this world,” Luther wrote, because they had the Word and sacraments in their midst.<sup>9</sup>

Luther viewed the sacrament of Holy Communion not as a sacrifice each time it was celebrated, but as a threshold to the presence of the one who had sacrificed once for all. Likewise, the Word and sacraments imparted the full presence of Christ, not partial quantities of merit, mere memories, or noetic benefits alone. The “means of grace” became a catechetical term among Lutherans and other Protestants who viewed the preaching and study of the Word, and the administration of Baptism and Communion, to be methods of living in and with the ongoing resurrected life of Jesus Christ. Those means could give reconnection to Christ in his abiding presence, but did not add or withhold anything from Christ’s work.

Lutherans in particular emphasized that the means of grace were not only outward signs of inward spiritual beliefs,<sup>10</sup> but were vehicles of Christ’s presence embedded in physical reality. In his Christology, Luther doggedly affirmed the incarnation of Christ, the union of his human and divine natures in his one person, and his ubiquitous lordship in all creation, even after the ascension (more on this below). Accordingly, Christ could be truly present anywhere he wished, in body and spirit, and had promised to be present in the bread, wine, and word of communion. Trusting that promise, a fearful sinner could go to the table of Christ to be in his presence, and receive the assurance of grace. But when that forgiven sinner would leave the table, the presence of Christ would neither flee nor remain trapped behind, but would go ahead and already be in creation.

### *Voice, Place, and Creativity*

The means of grace create their own scenes of grace in at least three ways: (1) Voice: by restoring voice to the marginalized of creation through the host voice of Christ; (2) Place: by creating their own equitable and inclusive places of blessing; and (3) Creativity: by unleashing instability that opens new directions.

The first way that the means of grace create their own scenes of grace is in the distinctive voice of Christ restoring the voices of the marginalized, in

human society and all creation. Christ went to an edge called Golgotha to stake his life and share his death with the marginalized. His enemies planned for Christ and his word to end like garbage strewn in the valley of Gehenna. But God did not let Christ go to waste,<sup>11</sup> and neither are any of the marginalized disposable. In turn, the words united with bread and wine and spoken over the table of the Lord reveal a host like no other, and a table like no other. It is a scene of redemption, because the one who was thrown out is not only salvaged by God but has become the harbinger of more new life than anyone could have imagined. A sense of being sent by God *from* the means of grace *into* the world is informed by the voice of one who joined the silenced, but speaks. So too the downtrodden of creation—humans and others—have a leading voice through which their own voices are restored or preserved.

A second way is clear in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where the apostle chastises those who were creating an environment of inequity at communion. The eucharistic celebrations were held in prominent homes. The working poor arrived late because they labored until sundown, but the affluent were able to start earlier. The poor were left outside with less to eat. Paul’s argument for equitable inclusion parallels his advocacy, in Galatians and Romans, for outsiders to receive hospitality and grace in Christ alongside those who felt entitlement on the basis of an ancient covenant. The scene of grace created by Christ’s table of presence is not only social but geographical. The new order of things broke forth from the presence of Christ in many locations, not only in sacred Jerusalem or in mighty Rome. The early church therefore favored images of the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God in its Christian art, evoking a sense of paradise that spread from Christ’s presence into the whole world he came to save.<sup>12</sup> The means of grace brought a distinctive sense of place to many different locations.<sup>13</sup>

Third, there is creative instability in and around every occurrence of the means of grace. Baptism is about radical transformation, according to the sixth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Christ emptied himself, according to lines from

an ancient hymn quoted in the second chapter of Philippians, so that many might be exalted from misuse and degradation. Pouring wine and breaking bread evoked Christ's emptying, and yet he became, and makes others, whole. The Word signaled upheaval and reversals. It made the last first and vice versa. It brought down powers and raised the lowly. The means of grace create such instability that most people become uncomfortable, try to mute the radical dimensions, and make over the means of grace into common devotional talismans. Although people persistently try to flatten them into univocal messages or symbols, the means of grace are multivalent and wildly unstable compounds. They continually open new horizons and reveal an unanticipated future. In this they are quite similar to the natural realm that they take up as partner, which scientists continue to find is amazingly random yet uncannily shape-full. Therefore, honoring the means of grace does not entail avoidance of hard data and changing perspectives on the world around. Scenes of creative randomness but majestic promise emanate from the means of grace. To complementary scenes in a wider frame of reference, we now turn.

## Scenes of Grace Complement Means of Grace

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Scenes of grace are rooted in Christ's active presence throughout God's full ecology of grace. Martin Luther spoke of Christ being "hidden deep in the flesh," found in "masks of God" throughout creation, even under an "opposite sign" than that which might be expected. While the church increasingly has limited its concern to the means of grace, scientists, artists, and naturalists have much to teach about scenes of grace. Whereas the Christian assembly around Word and sacraments enacts the public practice of the means of grace, the wider environment sustains voices, places, and creativity expressive of God's wider purposes, where humans face their limits but learn their proximity to God.

To hear the Word resounding on acoustic waves, to baptize with liquid borrowed from the hydrological cycles of the planet, and to receive the presence of Christ with bread and wine of the earth, is to honor and cherish the animating presence of the spirit of God in creation, and the sustenance of God's ongoing creativity. A triune God comes into focus when animating spirit, ongoing creativity, and once-for-all redemption emerge together. The unity in trinity and trinity in unity of God lies behind the affirmation of the deep connection between means of grace and scenes of grace. The means of grace that particularly bring the promise and presence of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, are upheld and amplified by scenes of grace expressive of the ongoing creativity of the first person of the Trinity. Those scenes also admit of animation characteristic of the third person of the Trinity. Means and scenes both depend upon the earth's ecosystems for their constitutive elements, but they are infused with the active interrelationships of the Trinity.

## *The Ubiquity of Christ*

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Luther's affirmation of the divinity and humanity of the second person of the Trinity informed his insistent refusal to reduce or parcel into pieces the divine presence of Christ, but so did his strong doctrine of justification by grace through Christ. The ubiquity of Christ is about the consistency of Christ's embodiment, but it is also about the completeness of Christ's work in the world he came to save. Everywhere Christ is, he is the same one who justifies through his cross. Lutheran Christology will not separate a saving spirit from Christ's body, but holds the contemporary presence of Christ to be as embodied and as whole as the twin-natured second person of the Trinity whom the church confesses Jesus Christ to be. An important implication of the ubiquity of Christ is therefore that the emergent aspects of God's ongoing creativity are infused by the same presence of Christ as are the once-for-all cross and the means of grace, although they may be differently encountered by believers and unbelievers, by receivers and rejecters of the one Christ;

and although they may be differently informed by the triune interrelationships of God.

While modern thought and practice drove a wedge between mind and matter, spirit and flesh, soul and body, strong affirmations about Christ's ubiquity were few. Today, theology is going to need help in learning again to describe richly the scenes of grace in nature if it is going to value them as part of the full activity of God in and through Christ. Nature writing, a genre that gives poetic voice to biological, geological, cosmological, and anthropological findings, may be helpful in that regard. Nature writing can give accessible shape to mounting scientific data about the environment by giving poetic and narrative connections for theological traditions rooted in narrative, myth, and symbol.<sup>14</sup>

### *Voice, Place, and Creativity*

Three topics increasingly common in nature writing over the past few decades will help to articulate scenes of grace: (1) Voice: the range of voices in and from the natural world create rich soundscapes; (2) Place: the integrity and character of places; and (3) Creativity: the volatile mix of random and purpose-shaped permutations that open new directions. Regarding the first topic, scenes of grace emerge in natural soundscapes, where the voices (and silences) of nature have purposes and meaning not yet fully understood by humans. The ecology of sound has only recently become a distinct field of study.<sup>15</sup> It traces the aural environment in which beings live, ecosystems happen, and human cultures become what they are. For the Lutheran approach to faith, centered on hearing the Word, any identification and mapping of how voices may resound in particular environments, and the soundscapes in which they subsist, has to be a fascinating concern. The resounding word in an environment joins and enunciates other voices, which may variously echo, harmonize, and counter-punctually interact with it.

Scripture recognizes the voices of the more-than-human world. It mentions the prayers of non-human beings on earth, and parts of the earth itself, in a number of texts. Even more numerous are the

enunciations of the earth that humans perceive to be proclamation addressed to them. Creatures and creation have distinctive voices to God, and to one another under mutual if differentiated relationships to God. It is not a big jump to trace scenes of resounding grace within natural soundscapes that help to give shape and a plenitude of meanings to earthly places.

A second way that scenes of grace may be described is by a sense of place. The intimate relationship between a community (biotic and human) and its place in the landscape is important to the persistence of that community, the handing on of traditions, and the maintenance of social bonds. In Wes Jackson's words, today's humans have the challenge of "becoming native to this place," whether they tarry for only a while or put down long-term residential roots.<sup>16</sup> The profound shift of western culture's relationship to the land portrayed by Wendell Berry<sup>17</sup> carves a space for the cultivation of scenes of grace in which care and community shape places. A new awareness of place and one's posture within it is a strong theme of nature writing and ecological literature today.

Scripture also shows great concern for place. God's first question to the humans in the second creation story was "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). When God swept Abram into covenant, God first showed Abram where he was: under the canopy of stars, i.e., in God's presence (Gen 15:5). The scriptures may be read as a long series of God's answers to God's own first question to humans. Time and again, God teaches humanity to sense their location and their proximity to God's presence, from the edge of the Jabbok to Elijah's cave, and on to the cross of Christ.

Third, nature writers describe the wild energies in nature, a mix of random and purpose-full shapes, which express the volatile creativity of nature. There are unstable, about-to-break-forth pods of energy in the universe, and in the life processes that humans struggle to comprehend. The random open-endedness of nature can be a strong challenge to human senses of meaning and well-being, as Annie Dillard famously described in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.<sup>18</sup> Scenes of justice and righteousness will not always be available in nature, but some aspect

of grace muted or hidden may still become apparent in the light of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Patience and silence may give time and space for perplexing or even repugnant patterns to resonate into wider coherencies, while some instabilities in nature will remain part of the boundaries over which finite humans may never cross.<sup>20</sup> The future can hold threat, judgment, promise, and hope. Lutherans confess that in Christ all things work together for good, but it is a transfiguring, re-shaping good that is emerging, not a patently safe status quo.

In the exodus narrative, there is a scene of grace that is dramatically surprising at the edge of a sea (Ex 14). Ahead of time, no one can anticipate exactly what shape the deliverance is going to take. There is literally no way out. Moses directs the people to keep still, and even Moses apparently loses focus, but then the sea opens and a way emerges where none was perceived before. The open-endedness of that scene of grace is surprising, ambiguous, and episodic. The situation was unstable, but a creative horizon emerged. Other desert experiences, struggles in various circumstances, and even mistakes and regrets fill the pages of Scripture, each one a pod of instability that explodes into a future given by God.

We must conclude, then, that scenes of grace might be quite different than expected. Luther affirmed that Christ could appear under “the opposite sign”—for instance, on a cross instead of a throne. The presence that Luther described for Christ in the creativity of God beyond the means of grace is more like that of a furtive wild animal, or a trickster figure in myth, than the vivid portrayals of gods in Greek and Roman myth. Rather than making the theology of the cross into a consistent validation of suffering, it remained episodic, contextual, embroiled in particularity, and idiosyncratic. Both the cross and other “opposite signs” evoke mystery and open-endedness of grace and its effects among finite creatures. Creative instability in scenes of grace allows room for the randomness, waste, and unexpected developments that science reveals in nature, and yet does not close off the possibility of shape-full purpose and identification of potential patterns thereof. The scenes of grace are fluid, on the way, part of an unfinished story.

And yet the work of Christ attests to and establishes the reliable salvation of God in the midst of it all. The creative instability in scenes of grace evokes a God beyond fathoming; but with the means of grace, creative instability frames and heightens the sufficiency of saving grace in Christ.

## Some Implications of Scenes and Means

Highlighting the relationship between scenes of grace and means of grace joins other efforts to relate traditional Christian theologies and practices to the environment, encouraging Christians to work for environmental justice, advocacy, and stewardship. When facing industrial destruction of nature the church too often spins back and forth like a broken compass, disoriented between competing concerns. On one hand, its scriptures and tradition affirm that the earth is God’s creation, and the subject of God’s continual care. That view would seem to suggest a level of sacredness for the earth, and a corresponding ethic of cautious and respectful interaction with it. On the other hand, the modern church has been a kind of chaplain to aggressive exploitation of the earth. Many treat the earth as if it were primarily a storehouse of resources, or a mess to be subdued. When economic opportunities collide with environmental sustainability the church divides between its chaplaincy to industry and its advocacy for the health of creation.

Hand-wringing ambivalence has happened among Lutherans before. Lutheran faith is so idealized, key analysts have claimed, that public political contradictions inevitably drive it inward. Ernst Troeltsch noted that mystical communion with Christ quietly subsisted amid the evident violence of the state. Today, denuded forests, carbon in the atmosphere, toxic waterways, and environmental injustice to the poor crowd a list of concerns labeled “temporal,” while the evident objective of faith becomes personal access to a heaven separated from conflicted earthly concerns.<sup>21</sup> Linking means to scenes of grace will not solve the ambivalence

problem by itself. However, if the environment is the setting or theater of God's graceful address to and encounter with humans and all creation, the temporal and the eternal are infused with each other. Ecologically listening to contextual voices, honoring integrity of places, and remaining observantly open to the creative instability of creation suggest fresh approaches to engagement.

For Lutherans and other Christian readers, the association of natural scenes of grace with the means of grace can be a lively way to revisit some important teachings about Christ's presence in creation that perhaps have receded behind personalized and disembodied versions of faith. This approach also gives room for portraits of grace informed by naturalists and scientists, as well as by religious and mythic traditions. A Lutheran approach to means and scenes of grace, based on the comprehensive sufficiency of grace in Christ, encounters all perceptions of grace as potential expressions of a whole that cannot be abrogated. From another room of the Christian household, Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, writes: "The entire created cosmos is a burning bush of God's uncreated energies."<sup>22</sup> Christ's union of the uncreated energies of God with the ecosystemically defined life, death, and resurrection that are his suggests an ecology of grace in a differentiated but united relationship with ecology of all life. Hence the means of grace invoke Christ's real presence in the world, and the presence of Christ evokes the grace in every scene.

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## Endnotes

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1. Not all ecosystems are as resilient as the Appalachian forests; nor should resilience in a particular place serve as an excuse for rationalizations and inaction regarding global climate change, deforestation, loss of species, the proliferation of inorganic toxins, or other issues.

2. This is my paraphrase of Martin Luther's position against other Protestants who argued that Christ's body ascended to heaven apart from the fleshly world of creation, and that therefore in the Holy Communion the bread and wine were vehicles of spiritual presence, if not memorial signs. Luther affirmed distinction between heaven and earth, but described heaven to be a creation of God, and the presence of Christ to be consistent and full.

3. The plain water, simple bread, wine, and human words were often featured in Luther's explanations of the means of grace. For example, see

Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs and Eric W. Gritsch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1966), 172. See also Ben Stewart's dissertation, "The Role of Baptismal Water at the Vigil of Easter in the Liturgical Generation of Eco-theology" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University dissertation, Emory University, 2010), published at Emory University's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation repository: <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/7mckz>; his article "Water in Worship: The Ecology of Baptism," *The Christian Century* 128, no. 3 (February 8, 2011); and his book *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011).

4. For a recent survey of the field see the first chapter of Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

5. The Trustees of Princeton University, "Wordnet: A lexical database for English," Princeton University, <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/> (accessed May 17, 2011).

6. Belden Lane's work on the role of landscape and place in Christian spirituality retrieves the importance of the creation around us, plus the creation within us, to perceptions and proclamations of grace. Lane's criteria for perceptions of sacred space, and his discussion of the hermeneutical and methodological issues involved have been helpful. See Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

7. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 40–43. The word *instruments* is the translation of the Latin version of the AC, while *means* is in the translation from the German edition.

8. See Belden Lane, "Backpacking with the Saints: The Risk-Taking Character of Wilderness Reading," in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 8:1 (Spring 2008), 23–43, esp. 26–28.

9. Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, especially 148–166.

10. Huldrych Zwingli in his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, and in his dispute with Luther at Marburg, was quite clear that the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith directly to the believer, and the means of grace are but outward signs. The majority of Protestants have been more comfortable with a noetic word creating faith, while the sacraments are symbolic affirmations of faith. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, Question 65 says: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? Answer: From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." My view that the word has a physical element, breath, akin to water, wine, and bread, stands in contrast to the prioritizing of noetic messages over the physicality of means of grace.

11. From a quote by Henri Nouwen: "The resurrection is God's way of revealing to us that nothing that belongs to God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never get lost." See *Our Greatest Gift* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 109.

12. Rebecca Parker and Rita Brock, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Susan P. Bratton, *Environmental Values in Christian Art* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2008).

13. Critical views of how Christianity arrived in places occupied by other religions, to take their places, are not to be glossed over, but often an assumed dualism between indigenous religions and Christianity predetermines an assessment that Christianity flatly colonized particular places and their cultures. Jonathan Z. Smith in *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) portrays Christian ritual occupying places not its own, but does not deal with the great variation in Christian sacramental theologies, some of which affirmed place and local culture. James F. Griffith takes a different tack in *Belief*

and *Holy Places: A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta* (Phoenix, Ariz., University of Arizona Press, 1992), 99: Acknowledging that Christianity was imported into “traditional native philosophy,” the resultant “native Christianity” functioned “less for individual salvation than for the maintenance of the health of the community, and by extension, of the whole world.”

14. For a start into the genre of nature writing, try Bill McKibben, ed., *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2008); and Robert Finch and John Elder, eds., *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* (New York: Norton, 1990).

15. See Bryan C. Pijanowski, Luis J. Villanueva-Rivera, et al., “Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape,” *BioScience*, 61:3 (March 2011), 203–216, published by University of California Press on behalf of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/bio.2011.61.3.6> (accessed April 22, 2011). Steven Feld published an ethnographic study of an indigenous culture in which the sound of waterfalls was constitutive of the culture. See “Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea,” in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Baso (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: School of American Research, 1996), 91–136.

16. Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (New York: Counterpoint, 1994).

17. Wendell Berry has many essays and books that well express sensibility for place, but one that weaves sociology with natural ecology is “The Work of Local Culture,” in *What Are People For?* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Point Press, 1990), 153–169.

18. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper, 1974), esp. chapter 10, “Fecundity.”

19. The “hiddenness” of Christ in the flesh, and the deeper “hiddenness” of God are, like ubiquity, little-known but potentially helpful doctrines. See Brian A. Gerrish, “To the Unknown God: Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God,” *The Old Protestantism and the New* (London: T&T Clark, 1982), 131–149.

20. At this juncture, Luther’s sense of finitude before the impenetrable majesty of God should come to mind. Impoverishment of a sense of God’s awful majesty, a problem in today’s church and world, is deeply related to modern refusal to accept nature’s sacredness at any level.

21. Ernst Troeltsch set down the basic analysis in *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2, trans. Olive Wyon (1911; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Reinhold Niebuhr embellished it in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribners, 1953), and H. Richard Niebuhr gave it the memorable label “paradox” in chapter 5 of *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951). Regarding a non-temporal and non-material goal for faith, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reported in its *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (2008) that 77 percent of mainline Protestants, in which ELCA Lutherans were included, believes in heaven. Meanwhile, 50 percent of that group agreed that “churches should keep out of political matters.” See The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, esp. pp. 138 & 168 in the main report and p. 11 in the “Summary of Key Findings,” (accessed September 2, 2011). The Gallup poll found a similar finding; see Gallup, “Americans More Likely to Believe in God Than the Devil, Heaven More Than Hell,” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/27877/Americans-More-Likely-Believe-God-Than-Devil-Heaven-More-Than-Hell.aspx> (accessed September 2, 2011).

22. Bartholomew I in *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*, ed. John Chryssavgis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 185.