

book reviews

Servant for Jesus' Sake

Theophil Janzow

Lima, Ohio: Fairway Press, 2005

Do you believe that the Lord works in strange, even miraculous ways, in order to lay out our paths and the working of His Church on earth? I certainly do. And so does Dr. Ted Janzow, who backs up this belief with a nearly unbelievable story of one congregation's call meeting in which one member stood up and nominated a young man who had preached there once as a seminarian. The only problem was that he truthfully could not remember that young man's name. Shockingly, the congregation supported that nomination! Amazingly, they managed to figure out who that young man was! Astonishingly, they called young Pastor T. Janzow! Wondrously, he accepted their Call!

Do you believe that there are times in congregational living when our own stubborn ways and worldly mindsets are almost laughably opposed to the ways of God? I certainly do. And so does Dr. Ted Janzow, who backs up this belief with a poignant (but also hilarious) story of a congregation (many decades ago, thankfully) whose members could finally no longer, in good conscience, be served by their pastor, because his wife couldn't speak German (and whose very salvation was, by their definition, quite unlikely).

Do you believe that so much of ministry success occurs when leaders are surrounded and supported by tremendously willing and able co-workers? I certainly do. And so does Dr. Ted Janzow, who tells not only of his important and fruitful years at Concordia University, Nebraska, but also of the challenging yet satisfying beginning of Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

With these and other great stories, one man's life is told, with full acknowledgement that it was woven by God Himself. A great man of God, in true humility, speaks eloquently of the value and the joy of a godly wife and children. This gifted and gracious servant of Jesus gladly bears full witness that mission work and reaching the lost is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in even the unlikely of places—a Christian college in a small town setting. We are even granted a child's glimpse into life in a parsonage.

As a major theme of every one of his stories and recollections, this "servant for Jesus' sake" gives full glory to the One who loves Him, and loves us all. That is as much a part of his legacy as the stories themselves. Those stories are worthy of being read and re-read.

This is Church history at its best. The stories are rich. They flow nicely. They speak of personal faith, of trust, of hope, of love, of God's faithfulness.

The reader will delight in these stories of a great and humble man of God. And, perhaps, the reader will understand (even act upon) the truth that every believer has stories to tell; stories in which the Lord's precious ways are revealed, and His Name praised. And it could be, that when everything else is said and done, this is among the noblest and highest results of knowing, reading and embracing Church history.

The Rev. L. R. Schnake

Director of Ministries
Christ Lutheran Church
Lincoln, Nebraska

Regarding the Cross

William Wolfram

Norfolk, Nebraska: Marathon Press, 2005

If this book were considerably larger and much heavier it would be a "coffee table book." It is primarily a visual feast. The author uses a computer to construct numerous fascinating cross forms from repeated photographic fragments in a way that recalls kaleidoscope designs. Text, though not unimportant, is secondary. That can rarely if ever be said about a basically theological work.

The author's theological stance is solidly Lutheran, clearly emphasizing Jesus, grace, sin and salvation. Within its modest dimensions the book contains a wealth of thought about the meaning of the cross. The symbolic content of the Greek cross form and the square is made clear. Occasionally the reader may have questions about the text. Was not Adam, as well as Eve, guilty of unbelief in the Garden? Are discussions of "theistic evolution" absolutely incompatible with God's grace for sinners?

Unlike contradiction, "good" ambiguity presumes some inherent harmony, if not

immediately or clearly understood. The ambiguity of the cross is, perhaps, at the heart of this book. Wolfram is careful to note that the photographs are not of "jewels or polished metals." Yet each image in the book is a highly crafted visual gem. Calvary's cross was literally an object of horrific torture and repugnance, but eyes that are refocused at the time of one's baptism into Christ's death see the cross as beautiful. This provides a rationale for the seductive graphic beauty of this book about the cross. The images (not really illustrations), book design, typeface choice, and printing are impeccable. Not that the images are superficially pretty—colors other than browns and grays come as a surprise. In the spirit of the 'resurrection crosses,' might the artist in another series use photographs of brightly colored or organic subjects?

Another ambiguity involves Wolfram's view that a corpus (dead body) on a cross is inappropriate because it suggests that the redeeming crucifixion was never completely overcome by Christ's resurrection. Yet many of his carefully chosen Bible texts make clear that we remember the suffering and death of the Son of God as redemptive—not the cross itself. Perhaps this arguable point is resolved by metaphors that the author may not fully (or consciously) acknowledge.

What should one make of the fact that the source material for most of the "perfect" Greek crosses involves ordinary things that are worn, old, ignored, discarded, rejected? Two things come to mind. First, Christ was not seen as being physically attractive, and he suffered rejection. Thus the physical stuff of the photos metaphorically *becomes* the body of Christ who took on humble form and participated in the transitory world. A second possible view is that by Christ's atoning sacrifice all things have been redeemed. He came for the imperfect, the downtrodden, the unworthy. With the nitty-gritty specifics of contemporary life we are brought to the cross to be re-formed into something new.

Artists working in a medieval monastery pushed the human limits of imagination and manual skill to illuminate the exquisite Book of Kells. They created complex interlace patterns with which to subdue abstract beasts within a symmetrical cross. What wouldn't they have given for tools like the digital

camera and computer that Wolfram puts to such good use?

We are in a time when some Christian churches deliberately eliminate every visual cross from their premises. This choice seems to play down the significance of the cross and sacrificial living for more user-friendly themes such as "Jesus as life coach." In *Regarding the Cross* Wolfram succeeds in upholding the centrality of the theology of the cross with conviction and produces what he intends, a source of personal meditation.

Richard Wiegmann

Professor of Art, emeritus
Concordia University, Nebraska

Practicing Passion

Kenda Creasy Dean

Grand Rapids, Michigan
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004

Finally we have a book that addresses the "something is missing" feeling that thoughtful pastors, youth leaders and campus ministers have occasionally experienced in their ministering of the Gospel. Author Kenda Creasy Dean believes that the church's ministry among young adults has been more about keeping them in the pews, raising mature adults, and appeasing our need to have an active youth program rather than connecting them to the passion of Jesus Christ.

Youth, by God's creative nature, are passionate. Young adults are the ones who have "causes," make seemingly irrational decisions, and proclaim love as the one thing worthy to die for. To be a "nobody" is the greatest fear facing youth. The church in the 20th century missed this developmental and significant characteristic of youth, and as a result has sought to tame and program youth rather than let them be transformed by the passionate love and person of Christ.

What is surprising (and refreshing!) about Dean's book is that she does not succumb to the "solution" of better programs, educational strategies, and more age-appropriate models; rather, she goes back to theology. Therein lies the next surprise. She speaks of the flabby theological identity of liberal Protestantism which has turned the church away from enacting the radical love

of God who sent his Son to the cross. She pleads for Christian ministers to preach, teach and enact the Gospel in a theological framework that is rooted in the suffering and sacrificial love of Jesus. She urges the church and its workers to open a "portal" between Christ and young people. That portal, she affirms, lies in Word and Sacrament as God's passionate reaching out for His people.

This is not a "how to" book. However, any campus minister worth his or her salt will be able to take her well-researched claims and utilize them in his/her ministry. This is not to say that there are no practical suggestions, even though the book intends to help the reader modify his or her perspective. The book contains voluminous footnotes accenting a well-read author.

The middle section of the book bogs down a bit in psychosocial perspectives and developmental psychology language. However, if the reader is patient, there are plenty of thought-provoking gems to be mined. Throughout the book the language may be somewhat unfamiliar and uncomfortable for frequent readers of Lutheran theological resources. However, there is nothing objectionable to a Lutheran readership. In one chapter Dean makes an interesting analysis of the passion of sex and the passion of faith. Not everyone will appreciate her insightful connection of the two as they intersect with young people, but she easily substantiates her thesis.

People who should read this book are those who are confident enough to question their own approach and attitudes about ministry. It will cause them to examine whether their preaching, teaching, mentoring and befriending have helped young people to intimately associate with the passion of Christ. While some adults may want to curtail and tame the passion of youth, Dean encourages the minister of the Gospel to steer it to the cross and let the youth be shaped by Christ Himself through Scripture.

This book will be especially relevant for campus ministers because of their ministry to those very young people who are seeking something (or some One!) to radically believe rather than to just be assimilated into the "niceness" of modern American Christianity.

The Rev. Wes "Bo" Baumeister
Chaplain, Concordia University, Nebraska





Kathrine Denny



CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

800 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434

Return Service Requested.

Route to: _____

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Seward, NE
Permit No. 4
