

# Consensus

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Volume 36  
Issue 1 *History of the Lutheran Theological  
Seminary in Saskatoon*

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Article 6

5-25-2015

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### Recommended Citation

Jensen, Gordon A. (2015) "The Theology of William Hordern: Living by Grace," *Consensus*: Vol. 36: Iss. 1, Article 6.

DOI: 10.51644/NVVL5845

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol36/iss1/6>

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## The Theology of William Hordern: Living by Grace

Gordon A. Jensen<sup>1</sup>

William (Bill) Hordern has had a great impact upon the theological scene in North America. Born in rural Saskatchewan, after a prominent career in the United States, he returned to Saskatoon to become the first president of the newly merged Lutheran Theological Seminary. Hordern authored at least 7 books, co-authored two others, edited a book series, and published over 100 articles for journals and magazines.<sup>1</sup> His work was cutting edge, addressing current issues with an incredible grasp of the theology of the sixteenth century reformers and twentieth century theological giants. One of his greatest strengths, however, was his ability to succinctly summarize and explain the complex theological ideas of other theologians. The abiding popularity of his book, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* reflected this ability in a graphic way. Hordern's summary of the main points of the Protestant theological thinkers, along with trends developing in theological circles, has provided countless readers with an excellent introduction to theological thought.

In 1520, Luther wrote a treatise entitled, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. It was Luther's prototype version of the *Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*.<sup>2</sup> In the dedication to his friend, Nicolas von Amsdorf, Luther noted, "I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of the reform of the Christian estate, to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in the hope that God may help his church through the laity."<sup>3</sup> Luther knew the importance of involving the laity in the reformation, and he realized that to do that, he had to explain his evangelical theology in concrete terms. In the treatise, Luther tears down three walls erected by the Romanists: 1) the artificial wall between clergy and laity, 2) the wall between the laity and the Scriptures, and 3) the wall that prevented anyone other than a pope to call an ecumenical council of the church.<sup>4</sup>

Hordern embarked upon a similar project in his theological career as he also worked to tear down three walls: 1) the wall between university and seminary; 2) the wall between church and society; and 3) the wall between universal theology and theological particularism. The tool that he used to tear down these walls is a theology solidly rooted in the reforming tradition of the church, as exemplified in the theology of Luther and Calvin, and their modern interpreters.<sup>5</sup>

### Tearing Down the Wall between University and Seminary

Lutheran Theological Seminary moved onto the campus of the University of Saskatchewan under Hordern's leadership.<sup>6</sup> This was quickly followed with the theological colleges beginning to develop a religious studies department at the University. Hordern

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made it clear that even with this arrangement, the church, and not the university, had to retain the responsibility for theological education.

In the countless discussions with the University, Hordern fought against the stereotypes that theological seminaries subjectively brain-washed the student while the university was the place where a student was faced with objective, logical analysis. The motto of the academy at this time, with its focus on “unbiased objectivity,” could be described by Hordern’s observation that “If you cannot see it, feel it, taste it, hear it, smell it or if you cannot kill someone with it or make a profit out of it, then it does not exist.”<sup>7</sup> Hordern and the faculty of the theological schools worked to overcome these biases, and the first half-time director of the religious studies program was Dr. Roger Nostbakken. A wall between theology and religious studies crumbled.

The religious studies department, staffed mostly by professors from the theological colleges in the 1970’s, was all the more remarkable given the gaining emphasis on the role of experience in the church. The emerging charismatic movement had placed a renewed emphasis on religious experience. Hordern addressed this emphasis on experience very ably in his 1983 book, *Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today’s Experiential Religion*. He argued that, contrary to common perceptions, “Faith ... is never a feeling of assurance, for such feelings come and go. Faith is the trust that is given by the Holy Spirit whereby we have confidence that God will keep the promises made in Christ.”<sup>8</sup> This trust in God’s promises was quite different than blind acceptance, to which the academy so often rightly objected. Hordern claimed that “The vital experience for the Christian is not some ecstatic inner feeling of God’s presence; rather it is the ordinary everyday experience through which we come to see God’s presence.”<sup>9</sup> Solid theological inquiry, as with any academic endeavour in religious studies, was committed to a rigorous inquiry that explored and interpreted objective, human realities, based on a God who became flesh in society rather than a sacred space. Christ was born in an observable public space. Thus, this shift from subjective, self-centered feelings to an emphasis on God’s actions and God’s objective word that is always spoken from outside of a person was a part of the reformation tradition to which Hordern subscribed. God’s Word always comes to us outside of ourselves, proclaiming the gracious actions of God.

This emphasis on having seminary and university engage each other was also fostered in Hordern’s book, *Speaking of God: The Nature and Purpose of Theological Language*.<sup>10</sup> In this volume, he argued that there needed to be an active dialogue between theology and analytical philosophy. Such interaction was essential, as he noted in the preface: “The tragedy of the relation between theology and philosophy since the rise of analytical philosophy has been that there has been no real conversation between the two disciplines. Most of the books that have dealt with analytical philosophy and theology have been written from one side and have been attempts to annihilate the other side.”<sup>11</sup> Further, while one discipline may have felt that the other had nothing to offer, Hordern argued that these two disciplines needed each other to sharpen and refine their own arguments, and to help each of the disciplines identify their limits in communicating abstract ideas and constructs.

In his conversations with the university, Hordern insisted that theological inquiry must be as rigorous as academic inquiry. As his students soon learned, lazy or second-rate thinking in seminary classes was not tolerated; nor was an unfounded bias against the seminary by the academy. People operate with subjective ideologies and assumptions in

both university and seminary, and both should be held accountable. Forced to interact with each other, ideas and ideologies would clash. Assumptions would be challenged. And in this interchange, learning occurred. One could not “check their brains at the door” of the seminary and survive any longer than they would survive at the university. His academic standards forced the walls of assumptions and ideologies to come down on both sides. Theology had an important place at the academic table.

At the same time, Hordern did not tolerate elitist language from the university or seminary if it obscured the ideas being expressed. While he insisted on high academic credibility at the seminary, he worked just as tirelessly in insisting that theologies and ideologies be explained in terms that were easy to understand. Theology had to be easily understood by society as well as the church. In fact, theologians in the church and academics at the university both had a responsibility to explain themselves to both society and the church in easily understandable terms. If neither church nor society could make sense of it, it had its limits. Hordern worked tirelessly in Saskatoon to relate the theological enterprise to the university and the public sphere, for the good of all. In the process, the walls between university and seminary, academy and laity, came tumbling down.

### **Tearing Down the Walls between Church and Society**

Perhaps the greatest impact that Hordern had on theology in North America, however, is found in his painstaking attempt to dismantle the walls between the sacred and secular spheres of life. This lifetime task was carried out on many levels. On one level, he recognized that a common language had to be spoken so that the two worlds could communicate. On another level, Hordern consistently addressed and challenged the false barriers that had been raised between the two worlds. Some of these false barriers were found in the form of practices that sharply contradicted the theology of the church.<sup>12</sup> It was in the moats around these walls between church and society that most of his theological battles were fought.

An overview of Hordern’s writings makes it quickly apparent that he was not content with living in a church ghetto in the midst of society. He was not afraid, for example, to address issues of euthanasia,<sup>13</sup> the role of religious schools in the public sphere,<sup>14</sup> or ideological shortcoming in the foreign affairs of governments.<sup>15</sup> At the height of the McCarthy era in the United States, he wrote his doctoral thesis, and then a book, on *Christianity, Communism and History*.<sup>16</sup> He addressed the topics of recreational drugs,<sup>17</sup> the election of Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1968,<sup>18</sup> and the interaction between Canadian culture and the gospel.<sup>19</sup> He also consistently spoke out against uranium mining in Saskatchewan, from a thoughtful theological perspective.

Hordern attacked the wall between sacred and secular, church and state, in three main ways. First, he addressed the barrier created by the church with its implicit support of works righteousness and a misunderstanding of justification. Second, he attacked the barrier created by the church’s lack of clarification between law and gospel. Finally, he actively challenged the church’s use of experience as the proof of the correct faith. Exploring how he attacks this wall between sacred and secular, allows a person to get a clear view of what was at the heart of his theology and an insight into his particular analysis of church and society.

## Barriers that obscure justification by grace through faith

One of the greatest stumbling blocks for the church in being a witness of God's grace to the world has been the disjunction between the message preached and the message lived. Hordern's willingness to address this huge obstacle to dialogue between church and society was especially clear in his relentless dedication to clarifying the doctrine of justification and its impact upon church and society.

In his book, *Living by Grace*, perhaps his best-loved book, Hordern gave countless examples of how the actions in the church have spoken louder than its message.<sup>20</sup> The church preaches God's justifying grace, but then spends all its energies acting as a morality squad. It proclaims the freedom of the Gospel, and then requires mandatory worship attendance at Christian schools. Hordern stated: "When the church accepts the role of being the civil religion and takes responsibility for the public morality, it easily leads to the view that the church must work for legislation to uphold morality. In North America civil religion has always tended to the view that if we did not have legislation against something we would be condoning it."<sup>21</sup> The church has placed a high wall of morality around itself to keep the immoral and unsavoury characters of the world at bay and to attract others. After all, gated communities are appealing! But when moral scandals committed by leaders in the church occur, as they invariably do, the credibility of the church as the moral agent of that society is severely damaged. Furthermore, when the church seeks to attract followers by emphasizing a morality that is often supported by a self-generated faith in one's own newly received abilities to overcome sin, God is all but forgotten. The spotlight too often shines on human achievements rather than the gracious actions of God. As Hordern noted:

To insist upon speaking of justification by grace alone through faith alone is to make clear the primary aspect of justification is not our faith but God's grace. Because God has acted for us in Jesus Christ, because God's love seeks us, because God forgives our sins, we are justified. This gracious act and attitude of God is received by us through faith, but it is not our faith that saves us, it is God's grace alone.<sup>22</sup>

The very action of justification by grace through faith, then, is about God tearing down the walls between God and humanity. The walls of Jericho did not come tumbling down because the Israelites blew on the trumpets: it was because God acted.

Society is structured on works righteousness, as evidenced in outward behaviours. People consider themselves righteous when they obey the law, and assume that this should also be the case in their relationship with God. As Hordern states, "Ethical behaviourism would define righteousness exclusively in terms of what a person does or does not do. Ethical behaviourism, so defined, is closely linked to what has been known traditionally as legalism, ... the keeping of certain rules or laws of conduct."<sup>23</sup> Yet this emphasis on ethical behaviour as the defining standard for one's relationship with God creates a gap between God and humanity, rather than a life in relationship. He noted: "Where Christianity consents to become a civil religion, it always loses the vision of justification. Caught in the paternalistic view that we are to be our brother's keeper, it insists upon laws to enforce the way of life that ought to be the fruit of the gospel. It becomes more concerned that people behave themselves than that they should become righteous in the biblical sense of the term."<sup>24</sup> Caught up in wondering how others will perceive it in this process, the church does not really take note of God, or what role God plays. It was for this very reason that

Luther constantly defined sin as being self-centered. Self centered people make their relationship with God dependent upon their morality and their ability to enforce morality. In the process, God is pushed into the fringes of life.<sup>25</sup> The first commandment is broken as people bask in the role of playing God, while God is relegated to an understudy role.

Justification, however, tears down all attempts at “building walls” with the bricks of self-justification: Hordern wrote, “Righteousness is based on relationship between God and us, created by God. It is not, cannot be based on rules or standards. The law cannot establish such relationships any more than it can create a happy marriage.”<sup>26</sup> Further, free from the human agenda of dictating to God and to society how they should behave, people can finally live in society, free to be a people for others.<sup>27</sup> Hordern put it this way:

Central to the doctrine of justification is a willingness to let people be themselves. Knowing that righteousness cannot be imposed from outside but must arise from within, the believer in justification will be prepared to accept other persons where they are. As the father in Jesus’ parable [of the prodigal son/forgiving father] gave his son the freedom to go into the far country, so believers in justification will know that they are not called to impose their views upon others.<sup>28</sup>

When the church quits trying to tell society how it must behave in order to be loved by God, and when it realizes that since all people are justified by God’s grace alone, all their good works should be directed toward their neighbour, and then the often hostile and suspicious walls between church and society crumble.

The doctrine of justification also attacks the walls between church and society by insisting that the focus of the church cannot be on itself and all its self-serving committees. This focus only isolates the church from society. Justification by grace through faith, however, forces the church into the world and makes it open to the world. Bluntly, Hordern asserted; “The doctrine of justification is rooted in the fact that Jesus’ mission made him the friend of sinners. From this we might suppose that Christian institutions ... would be marked by a greater willingness to provide a place for sinners than would be found in similar secular institutions.”<sup>29</sup> Yet this new “openness” to the world is threatening for many within the church who have been caught up in measuring morality. In response to these sceptics, however, Hordern pushed his point even further:

The relationship with God that flows from justification frees the person to love [their] neighbor. But works-righteousness, by its very nature, seeks to perform religious acts directed toward God in the hope of winning God’s favor and turning aside [God’s] wrath. When churches put their prime emphasis upon activities within the institutional structure of the church, and when the primary tests of active membership are attendance at worship services and the giving of money to the church, then inevitably the practice of the church is teaching a works-righteousness.<sup>30</sup>

Hordern did not cut the church any slack at this point. At stake is the incarnation. God acts to enter the world and engage the world on the basis of relationships created by God, rather than human behaviours. The walls of morals and works righteousness, no matter how beautiful they look to legalists in both church and society, cannot stand against such an assault. But even more than this, justification by grace through faith means that a

person cannot take a morally superior attitude towards others, and erect a wall of judgement. Justification removes all grounds for being judged by others, just as it also removes the right for the church to determine who is saved, based on morality. In an eloquent way, Hordern noted:

If I believe that I am justified by grace through faith, then I am keenly aware that my sins are forgiven. I stand where I stand before God, not because of my good deeds or my brilliant ethical decisions, but because God loves and forgives me. Therefore, even though it seems to me that a fellow Christian is acting in a way that is seriously out of harmony with Jesus Christ, dare I cast the first stone? Dare I say that I am right in this matter and he is wrong?...

A church that patterned its practice in the light of justification would be one in which there was a free acceptance of the members by each other. Agreement upon ethical conduct would not be a prerequisite for fellowship. In such a church each Christian would feel free to practice and defend his choices without fear that he would be cast beyond the pale for so doing.<sup>31</sup>

Justification by grace through faith, as Hordern well recognized, is the most powerful tool the church has for tearing down the walls between church and society.

### **Barriers created by the wrong understanding law and gospel**

Panic sets in when people suggest the possibility of living by grace rather than by moral injunctions. In panic mode, the church reverts to acting as its brother's keeper, totally misunderstanding the story of Cain and Abel,<sup>32</sup> and the relationship the church is to have with society.

Hordern's detractors often labelled him an antinomian. Such a label is both unfortunate and inaccurate. It is clear – even in his book *Living by Grace* – that he was not against the law. What he was concerned with, as was Luther, was the proper use of the law. The right use of Law and Gospel was not to club people into moral behaviour, even though godly behaviour is a desired “by-product” arising out of God's actions of justification. Immoral behaviour is a symptom, rather than the cause of the human predicament identified by the Law/Gospel dialectic. The root problem that the law addresses, as identified by Luther, is the intrinsic human desire to be gods in God's place.<sup>33</sup> Preaching the law, then, is to challenge the human will or desire that wants to be at the centre of attention while relegating God to the sidelines. This is what Lutheran theology identifies as the second, or theological, use of the law. From this perspective, the law is a mirror, revealing the sin of self centered wills and human attempts at self-justification. Thus, following Luther's lead, Hordern noted that there is validity in the practice of distinguishing between sin and sins. He stated, “When the word is used generically, in the singular it describes the condition of the person who is in bondage. A symptom of sin is that a person commits sins.”<sup>34</sup> This distinction is profound. Sin is that which curves a person in upon themselves, enslaving them. In the preaching of Law and Gospel, therefore, the second use of the Law is to be used. Its primary purpose is to address the first commandment, dealing with sin, rather than the sins that follow.

In terms of Law and Gospel, if the church preaches the Law as that which condemns our sins of morality, then this civil (first) use of the law, rather than the Gospel, also provides the human solution to the problem of morality. People are then told to simply “do



better,” or “do just a little bit more,” and God will love you. In the process, however, the Gospel message of God’s unconditional grace for “those who are yet sinners” (Romans 5:8) is relegated to the background. God’s grace is only needed for those who cannot succeed on their own. The correct preaching of the theological (second) use of the law, on the other hand, involves preaching two alternatives: human ways or God’s way.<sup>35</sup> One way is the path of the moral control; the other is the way of the Gospel.

Further, the first or civil use of the law is interpreted by humans in a way that allows them to manipulate and control others. Following these laws cannot bring life – the most that the civil use of the law can do is to try to control life. Only the Gospel can give life. To love God and neighbour with all the heart and mind and soul and body cannot be done with the keeping of the law or by being our brother’s keeper. It can only be achieved by God bringing people into a new relationship.

### **The barrier of Spiritual Experiences as a Condition for Faith**

The last half of the twentieth century was marked by a heightened interest and attraction to experience. There was experimentation with “experimental” drugs, and in the church the charismatic movement exploded. Often, decisions were made on the basis of experience rather than data. In the church, experiences have often overshadowed doctrines as the valid basis of agreement. Truth became measured by one’s experiences. In the seminaries, this new emphasis on experience is partially reflected by the interest in, and demand for, spiritual formation, not as historically understood, but as formation by experiences and feelings. The predominant question in classrooms was no longer “What do you think?” but rather, “How do you feel?” No doubt, this did provide a needed corrective to a sterile orthodoxy. Experiences became the gold standard of measuring faith and piety, typified by the phrase, “it doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.” For such people, the goal of worship was to create “spiritual” experiences in individuals, rather than the apparently less engaging corporate praise of God and the proclamation of the Gospel.

Hordern addressed this emphasis on experience by turning to Luther’s theology of the cross. He argued that while experience and good works are important in the Christian life, both are fruits of God’s actions of justification, rather than prerequisites for justification. When people rely on experience or feelings as a measure of the validity of their faith, or when they are not willing to “test the spirits” or examine these inner feelings in light of the external proclamation of the Gospel, problems arise. Feelings constantly change, so basing one’s faith upon them is akin to building a house upon the sand. In examining this danger, Hordern pointed to Luther’s own experiences. As he observed, “Luther came to know that he could not live by such changing feelings within himself. He discovered that the important thing was not how Luther felt or how strong Luther’s faith was but how God felt about Luther.”<sup>36</sup> The antidote to human inner feelings is the external (*extra nos*) proclamation of the Gospel, as seen in God’s incarnation into the world. This led Hordern to state, “Centered in the Word that became flesh, emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, depending on the spoken word and the water, bread and wine of the sacraments, the theology of the cross sees the material world as having a central place in God’s plan.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the Christian faith is not devoid of experience. Instead, this experience is grounded in the life-giving activities of God, not on personal naval gazing. Experience is not rejected, but placed into its proper context, in relationship to God’s saving actions. This forces the



church to engage society in acts of service, rather than offering escapes from reality. Hordern put it thus: “Where there is faith there will be experiences of God but these are gifts given by God and are not a sign of higher or better faith. ... Once we understand that our justification is linked with faith, not to experience, we can thank God for the experience we have received without thanking God that we are not like our neighbor who did not receive the same experience.”<sup>38</sup> If people want to “experience” God, therefore, the best way to do this is in service to the world. Hordern stated, “just as God is to be served through service to people, so God is best experienced in relationships with other people in the daily life. Christian experience is not simply some inner, mystical ecstatic feeling; Christian experience is any experience (including hauling manure) of a person who has faith in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Promising wonderful religious experiences or feelings, therefore, cannot be the bait for the evangelistic practices of the church. If the church were to try to compete with everything in society that promises people ever better and “more authentic” experiences, it would have no chance. Rather, God calls and equips people to authenticity in the midst of the society that it so desperately tries to escape. God is in the everyday experiences of human life.

Not having the “right” spiritual experience, therefore, cannot be used as a criterion for excluding people. All too often, if someone does not have the predetermined “proper” experience, or if they feel differently about a social issue than the gatekeepers of religious experience, they are excluded. The countless debates and divisions in the church and in society over matters of sexuality are prime examples of the ways in which experience or feelings about practices are used as the moral or authoritative standard for judgement. How one feels about something becomes as important as the laws of morality in controlling people. Barriers are erected, rather than torn down. However, as Hordern observed,

Christians will not always agree upon which actions are most loving in concrete situations. ... This tendency of Christians to reject fellow Christians because of different ethical conclusions often results in a lack of openness and honesty between Christians. ... When Christians get together they carefully avoid bringing up political or social issues because they fear that disagreement in these areas will destroy their Christian fellowship.<sup>40</sup>

Forgotten in the process is the life-giving power of the Gospel that tears down walls and opens sealed tombs. Feelings or experiences, as fickle as they are, cannot bring life and salvation into relationships any more than the law can bring dry bones to life. Only God’s grace can bring life and destroy the barriers and walls between church and society.

## **The Wall between Universal Theology and Theological Particularism**

One of the most attractive things about a universal, systematic theology such as provided by Calvin or Barth is that it provides stability in the midst of an ever-changing world. Here one finds truths for all times and all places. But one of the greatest problems of these same theological systems is that they assume that their experiences of God and of the world are shared by all people in all places. Hordern recognized, before many theologians, this tension between universal and particular theology. When many prominent theologians were rallying against the “perversity” of any theological particularism<sup>41</sup> such as the

feminist, political, liberation and black theologies and that were appearing, Hordern calmly supported these attempts at making theology truly incarnational.<sup>42</sup> Central to all of these new theologies was “a concern to see Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and/or the oppressed.”<sup>43</sup> Further, these theologies play a prophetic role, articulating the realities of the world as it is, rather than being content with promising a world in the “sweet by and by.” In these discussions, Hordern challenged the willingness of the church to not address the barriers of injustice that permeated it.

Hordern was a strong leader and advocate of these liberation theologies that challenged the barriers church and society erected to insulate itself from those who do not fit into the traditional Eurocentric white male versions of the church. He strongly supported these new theologies that took present realities and injustices seriously. But he also recognized that, as with all things, there were potential dangers associated with them. One of the dangers with particularism was that it, like all theologies, is tempted to universalize its own experience as a universal truth. But when that happens, the fullness of the gospel is forgotten.<sup>44</sup> Another danger is that these particular theologies may “blunt our understanding of the radical love of God” forgetting that “Christ died for the oppressors as well as the oppressed. Beyond the battle for justice lies God’s acceptance of sinners.”<sup>45</sup> In the midst of one’s own experiences of God, Hordern harkened back to Luther’s emphasis on the Word of promise and Grace that comes from outside of human experiences and expectations, and which makes people new creatures in the very world in which they find themselves. This is living the incarnation.

The liberation theologies that have arisen in the last half century also challenge the assumption that the Bible contains only timeless truths, and that all interpretations of the bible in the past are still universally valid. Sometimes, those interpretations about such things as “astronomy, biology, marriage and divorce, homosexuality, slavery, the status of women, and so on” are based on faulty assumptions about God and scripture, however. Thus, Hordern wrote,

This view that Scripture provides timeless truths is not only contrary to the way revelation develops in the Bible, it is contrary to the teaching of Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all the truth” (John 16:12-13, TEV). Here is the definite promise that God, through the Spirit, will continue to guide the church into further truth. God will continue to act and speak in and through history. When the bible is treated as a collection of timeless truths, it distorts the biblical view that its ultimate truth is a person and allegiance to the truth is allegiance to Christ.<sup>46</sup>

If indeed, “Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever,” (Hebrews 13:8), and that Jesus has promised to “do new things,” then those new things will happen to humanity. The scandalous changes that are required are to happen in how humanity views God and the world. It is Christ who is the same, not truths about Christ,<sup>47</sup> and that means that humanly “assumed” truths will have to change. That is the radical nature of the Gospel. Based on this, Hordern was in the forefront of speaking out against injustice and oppression, while proclaiming God’s grace to all.

## Conclusion

Hordern has had a big impact in tearing down many of the theological walls and barriers that have isolated the church and the message of the Gospel from a disbelieving public. At the forefront of his theological agenda is his commitment to justification by grace through faith, rather than moral purity as the key to any helpful engagement of the church with society. The identifying mark of the church is not morality but the Gospel. Of course, this emphasis is not new in Lutheran circles. For example, in Article Seven of the *Augsburg Confession*,<sup>48</sup> the church is defined in terms of the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Morality is not even mentioned, even though it is what society has often expected of the church.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as churches confront the realities of increasingly being relegated to the sidelines of society, the emphasis that Hordern placed on the proclamation of the Gospel, the message of justification by grace through faith, still provides the entry point for an engagement with society. The walls between church and society have been built ever higher and these walls have been reinforced by a church focussing almost exclusively on issues of sexual morality. Perhaps the real question, in the end, is whether the church dares to take the steps necessary to be a church of the Gospel and proclaimed and revealed in Jesus Christ. The extent of William Hordern's impact on the church and society in the twenty-first century can ultimately be determined by whether the church in North America is willing to take the risk to focus again on justification by grace through faith. His call for a new reformation theology is still waiting for a response.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough, but dated list, see Walter Freitag, ed., *Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1985), 257-67.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*, Revised and expanded edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Helmut T. Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, 55 Volumes (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965-1986, Volume 44, 123. Hereafter referred to as LW).

<sup>4</sup> LW 44:126.

<sup>5</sup> These modern interpreters included, but were not restricted to, theologians such as Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr, and Tillich.

<sup>6</sup> See here, William Hordern, *Challenged by Change: Memoirs of a Seminary President*. Canadian Lutheran Historical Association, Occasional Publications 1 (Regina, SK: University of Regina, 1994), 19-20. It is important to remember that this move took place even though some of the church leaders had reservations about such a move, and even though the seminary had the option to reverse their decision to move.

<sup>7</sup> William E. Hordern, *Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today's Experiential Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 97-8.

<sup>10</sup> William Hordern, *Speaking of God: The Nature and Purpose of Theological Language* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Hordern, *Speaking of God*, vii.

<sup>12</sup> Tearing down these barriers, however, is not always welcome. Some feel threatened when their comfortable self-erected barriers are challenged. Others, however, welcomed this project as they got a whiff of the first aromas of liberation and freedom from a dead legalism.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Hordern, "Some Reflections on Euthanasia," *Christianity and Crisis* (April 17, 1950), pp. 45-46; "Hastening Death," *The World Christian Digest* (September 1950), 17-20.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Hordern, "Our Colleges and America's Religious Revival," *The Lutheran Companion* (June 26, 1957), 4-5, 16; "America's Religious Revival: How Deep Does it Go?," *Lutheran Standard* (August 24, 1957), 8-10; "When a Christian Goes to College," *The Episcopalian* (September 1963), 10-13; "The College Student and Religion," Parts 1-3, *Presbyterian Life* (September 1 and 15, and October 1, 1963), 6-9, 35; 12-15, 42; and 20, 36-38.

<sup>15</sup> Hordern, "A Perspective on Foreign Affairs," *Worldview* (November 1961), 4-8.

<sup>16</sup> William Hordern, *Christianity, Communism and History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954).

<sup>17</sup> Hordern, "A Theological Critique of the Psychedelic Experience," *Dialog* (Summer 1964), 220-222.

<sup>18</sup> Hordern, "Canada's New Prime Minister," *The Christian Century* (May 29, 1968), 713-15.

<sup>19</sup> Hordern, "Canadian Culture and the Gospel," *Consensus* (April 1975), 7-14.

<sup>20</sup> William Hordern, *Living By Grace* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 9-26.

<sup>21</sup> Hordern, *Living by Grace*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Hordern, *Living by Grace*, 25-6.

<sup>23</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 28-9.

<sup>24</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 65-66.

<sup>25</sup> Hordern makes reference to this in *Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*, 219-21.

<sup>26</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> This, of course, echoes Bonhoeffer's theology. See here, Hordern, *Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 45.

<sup>30</sup> Hordern, *Living by Grace*, 131-32.

<sup>31</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 181.

<sup>32</sup> Hordern makes a convincing argument that we are not called to be our brother's keeper, for this leads to patronizing of others. See here, *Living By Grace*, 50-53.

<sup>33</sup> Luther, in a letter to George Spalatin, dated June 30, 1530, wrote: "... fight that innate ambition to be like God, which was planted in us in paradise by the devil. This [ambition] doesn't do us any good. It drove Adam from paradise, and it alone also drives us away, and drives peace away from us. In summary: we are to be human and not God; it will not be otherwise, or eternal anxiety and affliction will be our reward." (LW 49:337).

<sup>34</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 93.

<sup>35</sup> Hordern's long reflections on extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, throughout his book, *Living By Grace*, constantly reflects this reality.

<sup>36</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> Hordern, *Living By Grace*, 177-78.

<sup>41</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 108.

<sup>42</sup> See especially Hordern's two chapters, "Experience and Liberation Theology" and "Particularism and Universalism in the Bible," *Experience and Faith*, 106-36.

<sup>43</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 134.

<sup>45</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 135.

<sup>46</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 125-6.

<sup>47</sup> Hordern, *Experience and Faith*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> AC VII.2-3. In this article, the essential marks of the church make no references to morality. Rather, what is essential for the unity of the church is that the “gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine word.” Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.