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In Honour of Gordon Jensen

William Harrison¹

This issue is a *festschrift* in honour of the Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen, long-time professor of historical theology (2001–2022) at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon (LTS). As editor for this issue, I have the pleasure of celebrating Dr. Jensen's accomplishments and reflecting on the contributions that his colleagues have made to this volume.

I am blessed to have gotten to know Dr. Jensen on his arrival at LTS in 2001 and to have taught alongside him. Dr. Jensen has always been dedicated to the ideals of high scholarship. His impressive record of publication makes that evident. However, his has never been scholarship in the abstract or in pursuit of academic standing. Everything that he has researched and addressed has been in service of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ that God is transforming the world in love through grace. This priority is reflected in the classroom where his knowledgeable teaching has been carefully prepared while remaining connected to the needs of the contemporary world and church. At the same time, all his work with students has displayed a truly balanced love of people and of learning. The attentiveness that marked Dr. Jensen's scholarship also showed in his work as academic dean at LTS. I found him to be the sort of person who reliably appeared with a meticulous draft of a policy at the exact moment when I became aware that we would need to produce it!

My greatest appreciation of Dr. Jensen, though, is kept for the ways that his gentle and deep sense of humour has touched his work. He is the donor of the annual Luther Bobblehead Award for Highest Grade in Lutheran Confessions (and yes, there is a Martin Luther bobblehead with names of winners entered on it). It was his garden ornament who was gnome-napped by students, dubbed "LutherGnome," was taken for journeys to Canadian and American destinations (including Lutheran synods, of course), was married to SolveigGnome after the Easter Vigil, fathered Hans and Katharina, and was returned to the Jensen home after an academic year of travel. The photo album continues to hold pride of place and shows up when the Jensens host students at their home, which they still do even in Dr. Jensen's retirement. I think that we might reasonably conclude that Dr. Jensen's sense of humour has a touch of Lutheranism in it.

In this issue, we celebrate a variety of other aspects of Dr. Jensen's contribution to Lutheranism—and to Christianity in general. Dr. Jensen is the author of three books and numerous articles, predominantly in the realm of historical theology. His current work is *The Call to Discipleship: Baptism, Vocation, and Community*. In 2023 he published *Experiencing Gospel: The History and Creativity of Martin Luther's 1534 Bible Project*, and in 2018 he released *The Wittenberg Concord: Making Space for Dialogue*. Together, these books show something of the range of Dr. Jensen's scholarship, linking many aspects of Lutheran heritage to contemporary pastoral concerns.

The entries in this volume of *Consensus* follow a similar trajectory. We begin with a tribute. Karen Kuhnert starts with Jensen's research, presented in *Experiencing Gospel: The*

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History and Creativity of Martin Luther's 1534 Bible Project, to highlight creativity in the proclamation and church development work of some lesser-known Lutheran pioneers – especially women and especially contributors to Canadian Lutheranism. Addressing such figures as Captain Jens Munck and Chaplain Rasmus Jensen, Elisabeth Van Der Smissen, and Louisa Cossman, illuminates the early history of Lutheranism in Canada – a central priority of Jensen's work.

In our peer-reviewed articles, Timothy Wengert's contribution, "The Lord's Supper and the Conversational Theology of Philip Melanchthon and Johannes Brenz," returns our attention to the focus on dialogue as a specifically Lutheran approach to theology, reminding us that Philip Melanchthon and Johannes Brenz worked hard to find agreement, both between themselves and with Martin Bucer, in the Reformation debate about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. In our present context, where opposing positions can easily harden in public discussion, this is a salutary contribution, and a reminder of Jensen's significant 2018 book.

Martin J. Lohrmann focuses on another contemporary issue from a historical perspective in "Gospel Organization: The Church Leadership of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558)." Lohrmann emphasizes the gospel-centric pastoral sensitivity and social concern that Bugenhagen brought to church leadership and Bugenhagen's priority of education at all levels for children and adults—a priority so overriding that Bugenhagen himself left his career as a pastor to study in Wittenberg. This topic reflects Lutheran concerns that are again mirrored in Jensen's life and career and in his article on "Lutheran Theological Education in North America" that appears in the *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*.

Robert Kolb's article on "Luther's Musical Legacy in the Preaching of His Students" turns to communication of a different sort that is still classically Lutheran. Kolb reminds us that Luther was a gifted singer, musician, and hymn-writer, and that Luther bequeathed these interests, these loves, to the Lutheran religious heritage. Kolb notes extensive sermon references to a variety of ways that music serves the Christian life. In my experience, Jensen has always loved to sing, reveled in hymnody, and had music playing in his office.

Allen Jorgenson's discussion of "Trade, Usury, and the Incursion of Desire" flows directly out of conversation with Jensen about Luther's understanding of grace and its significance for the relationship between Settler cultures and Indigenous peoples. Jorgenson traces ways that the peculiar economics of capitalism, driven by the desire for satiety, are imposed upon Indigenous peoples and land as part of the dynamic of Settler empire. These kinds of considerations occupied Jensen's thoughts, especially as he participated in the leadership of LTS's efforts to expand relationships with Indigenous peoples, including LTS's course on Indigenous Intercultural Relations and LTS's "Cultivating Educational Capacity" project.

In an address given at BC Synod Study Conference, Kayko Driedger Hesslein links the Lutheran emphasis upon good order with the challenge of decolonization. Driedger Hesslein invites us to think differently about order and its interaction with power relations, reminding us of the Indigenous and gospel concern for right relationship over against the temptation to treat order as control. This evokes Jensen's constant theme of the gospel as invitation to relationship, and his concern for engaging with Indigenous people on whose land we are.

We also have some more personal reflections on Jensen's contributions to Lutheran life. Stephen Larson draws together a reminder of Jensen's clown ministry with

considerations of sacramental life and international Lutheranism. Here, again, we see Jensen's sense of humour linked to other core priorities: sacraments, Lutheranism, and the worldwide character of the church.

Matt Lyseng reminds us of the engaging quality of Jensen's parish-level teaching and the ways it has encouraged many to find vocations to all kinds of ministry—including the pastorate—as well as the support that Jensen has offered along the way. Lyseng draws attention to the ways that Jensen has always carried together pastoral care, personal support, and theological instruction. He has always gone out of his way to ensure that people can learn what they are capable of learning.

Lynn Granke reminisces about the work of the National Youth Ministry Committee of the ELCIC, in which both she and Jensen were engaged. Granke draws a picture of energetic engagement with Christian faith as reflected in a firm commitment to caring for the needy and vulnerable.

Susan Johnson, ELCIC National Bishop, describes the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and speaks to Canadian participation. Jensen has a history of significant involvement with Lutheranism internationally, speaking in LWF contexts, travelling with our cross-cultural trips, leading trips to European Lutheran destinations, and thinking extensively about the international character of Lutheranism.

Our sermon section includes five contributions, with two specifically connected to Jensen's work. Larry Kochendorfer celebrates Jensen's engagement with the LWF and his theological priorities of grace and revelation in a sermon delivered to the Lutheran World Federation Council in 2020, "Because We Know God's Voice." The centrality of divine love, reaching us in grace, is evoked through images of gentle acceptance as reminders that God enfolds us in God's care.

William Harrison speaks to ecumenism and the life of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, both of which are themes close to Jensen's heart, in a sermon entitled "Waterloo Ministry and the Future of LTS." Jensen has served extensively in ecumenical dialogue, most notably in the Anglican Church of Canada–United Church of Canada Dialogue, where he served first as Lutheran observer (2003–2009) and then on behalf of the Anglican Church, after the two churches reached full communion (2012–2020). Jensen also served as chair of the ELCIC Committee on Ecumenism (1997–2002), at the historic moment when "Called to Full Communion" was recommended and accepted.

Together, the variety of contributions to this *festschrift* touch on many aspects of Jensen's life and work. They reflect a life that has been, and continues to be, richly led in service to God and the church, deeply inspired by Lutheran heritage. We are blessed to have learned from Dr. Jensen and look forward to his further contributions.