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*How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of
Conversation in the Church* by C. Christopher Smith (review)

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theological resonance. For the aspiring sophisticate, it is a helpful introduction to the wide world of wine itself, from root-rhizomes to glass. The pastor, theologian, and sacristan will, after reading, perhaps fill or drink the chalice with less nonchalance—maybe with a costlier bottle, too. As a reflection on the world we have lost, and on the perils of our own present, however, only time will tell how well this book ages.

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How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church. By C. Christopher Smith. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019. xii + 206 pp.

It would seem that a book advocating talking is unnecessary. But think again. We Lutherans confess that the church offers a space where the “mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren” can flourish. Of course, Lutherans affirm that the church is primarily about proclamation, Word and Sacraments, not conversation. No doubt, proclamation establishes Christian community. But Christian community is nurtured, furthered, and aided by conversation. This book—an exercise in “practical theology”—merits the attention of both pastors and theologians.

Smith, founding editor of *The Englewood Review of Books* and a member of an urban evangelical congregation in Indianapolis, offers direction for promoting intentional conversation within congregations. Smith draws on the belief that the life of the triune God is itself an eternal conversation between the three persons of the Godhead (15), and that from the overflow of this inner-Trinitarian communication, Christians are equipped to be hospitable and make room for others (16). The “nature of conversation is fundamentally about listening and being present with others in our community as we learn to practice the word of mutual presence that is inherent in the Trinity” (51). Indeed, our nature as human creatures is to be communicative and conversational (25).

From this theology, Smith offers practical advice for congregations. Ideally, conversational groups should (1) range from five to seven people, (2) seek a mixture of homogeneity and heterogeneity, (3) offer both formal and informal gatherings, and (4) be led by a facilitator who maintains the ground rules of the discussion (33–37). Such groups need to honor the emotions of all interlocutors and direct them in ways which build up community (39). For starters, such conversations, which in Smith's congregation occur on Sunday evenings, could be held quarterly or biannually, especially where congregations are new to intentional conversation (43). The content of conversations can take on matters of the congregation's identity and mission, the focus of the sermons, and even divisive issues (54–57). Smith notes that advocates of conversation can expect some to resist this practice and should respond to naysayers pastorally (43). Smith is optimistic that honest conversation can have a missional impact on congregations: "As we learn to talk with one another . . . speaking honestly and listening compassionately, we will begin not only developing the capacity to act faithfully in regard to this question but also maturing in our ability to talk about other questions that divide us" (61).

Conversations done prayerfully, in the midst of life's "messiness," help bring people together, establish solid mentoring (through catechesis), and healing: "Just as our body parts talk and work together to heal broken bones, so too fractures in our churches cannot be healed without conversation. Too often, we would rather ignore the pain or cut it off than actually have a conversation because that might mean we would have to change" (157). Conversations help peacemakers "who hold our fractured parts together and keep them talking and working toward healing" (157). No doubt, Smith is correct that conversation can help peace-making when all parties involved are sincere. However, all too often sinful humans are seeking through "conversation" solely to get their agenda accomplished. I would urge that conversation facilitators be aware that conversation is not done apart from power and that a good facilitator may need to referee conversations so that all parties gain a voice.

Americans are adept at spouting off their opinions, rooting for their own tribe, and demarcating boundaries, but are not as adept at

two-way communication with its give and take, and its compromises. With our political divisions, along with our ethos of individualism, we are skilled in delineating turf, but we are weak at establishing understanding or empathy. Christians are often no better than non-Christians in this regard. But Christians have at their disposal resources to bring people of different walks of life together in environments sufficiently safe for honesty. I would urge that this book receive widespread attention in the church.

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Religion in the University. By Nicholas Wolterstorff. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. 192 pp.

Tertullian's question—"What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"—makes sense in a context where faith still vitally impacts a culture. However, with the rise of secularism, faith influences the academic community less than in the past. As Wolterstorff notes, the secular heritage, articulated by Max Weber, sees religion as a private matter (16). Wolterstorff explains how such secularism in the academy has arisen and how more recent developments in philosophy can help religion find its voice.

The Weberian mindset singles out knowledge as derived from three sources: (1) perception, direct cognitive access to external physical reality; (2) introspection, direct access to subjective reality; and (3) rational intuition, direct access to necessary truths (20). Religion, it would appear, falls short of these three routes to truth, and so would have no place in the academy (23). Acknowledging developments within the scientific and philosophical communities, Wolterstorff challenges this Weberian perspective. For instance, Thomas Kuhn noted that for science it is not evidence alone which determines theory but also other factors such as simplicity, elegance, explanatory power, and conservatism (37). Likewise, Hans-Georg Gadamer pointed out that interpretation is no add-on to facts but instead with respect to facts "goes all the way down" (39), that is, there are no "facts" apart from interpretation. Hence, Weber's highlighting