

tian people must learn good behavior, so must Christian pastors, especially at the altar.

Perhaps, then again, there's some other reason that I haven't thought of. But if we can deal at least with these possibilities, then hopefully we could begin to see less of rushing, carelessness, haphazardness, laziness, etc. Less, that is, of sloppiness, in our churches.

But I will continue to be sloppy when I eat popcorn, and you may as well. In fact, I encourage it, if only for the benefit of gleeful children. ✕

Notes

¹ SC VI

² Ap XIII 5, *Concordia Triglotta*.

³ "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon," NPNF I:4, 244.

⁴ "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon," 244f.

⁵ See SC I 3.

⁶ *Large Confession concerning the Lord's Supper*, as cited in FC SD VIII, *Concordia Triglotta*, italics added.

Commentary on the War: Toward Gaining Ground in the Ministry

In Praise of Maintenance

David H. Petersen



In the introduction to their book *The Innovation Delusion* (2020), authors Lee Vinsel and Andrew L. Russell, both university professors, ask their readers if they ever get the feeling that everyone around them is worshipping the wrong gods, if "through fluke or oversight, our society's charlatans have been cast as its heroes, and the real heroes have been forgotten?" (6) The charlatans they are speaking of are purveyors of what they call "innovation-speak" and a "few out-of-touch billionaires" (9) who give stupid advice such as "move fast and break things" (6). They are charlatans because their advice is either impossible to follow due to its vagaries, or it is actually harmful. They present themselves as experts who can improve a company's finances or help a city attract the creative class, but their advice doesn't work. Vinsel and Russell define innovation-speak as "a breathless dialect of word salad that trumpets the importance of innovation while turning that term into an overused buzzword" (10).

The real heroes for Vinsel and Russell are the mechanics, plumbers, and various maintainers and caregivers who keep things running. The authors are not anti-technology or innovation. They are, however, markedly pro-maintenance, and they provide a nuanced and detailed account with loads of evidence that deferred

maintenance and a failure to prioritize maintenance is disastrous for humans and all their institutions and property. They also show that actual innovation or technological change has been decreasing since about 1970 even as "innovation-speak" has been on the rise. Finally, they show that the best predictor of profitability, and what is best for humanity is not innovation and disruption as it is sold by innovation speakers but is maintenance and reliability (13).

The book is mainly focused on public policy, business strategies, and education, but it is obvious to even the most casual observer from the Church that the "innovation-speak" they are exposing and deriding has also enchanted American Christianity and presumably the Church in all of the Western world. I recommend this book to everyone. It will not only help you see some of what is wrong with our world and our churches but also some of what is wrong in your own personal life and how to address it. In the end, it is a song of praise for maintenance and repair and casts a critical eye at much of what is corrupt and wrong-headed in progressive ideology bent on fixing the world and solving nearly every problem with technology when, in fact, technology often makes things worse.

Many of our readers, at some point, will have heard from some minister or synodical employee normal Word and Sacrament parish ministry denigrated as "maintenance ministry." Some of us have, from time to time, gotten the feeling that the district or synodical leaders and ministerium seemed to be preaching a different Gospel, if not out-and-out worshipping a different god. At times, mission charlatans have been cast as heroes while the real heroes of the Church have been forgotten if not denigrated. The implication in lionizing innovators in the Church is often that "maintenance ministry" is either selfish and lazy or is the best that rather inept and incompetent pastors can manage. Many of us have heard similar derision for "brick-and-mortars" over programs. This book is a needed remedy from a non-theological point of view to that sort of thinking. It helps us see that our own charlatans are not driven so much by love of the lost as they been motivated by and bought into the hype of the sort of adventure capitalism that idolizes Silicone Valley. That is why their church buildings look the way they do and why they want to move fast and break things and think digital technology can or will somehow revolutionize the Church.

The mission charlatans are those who engage in a word salad sprinkled with the vocabulary of Lutheran orthodoxy but who are almost indistinguishable in appearance, tone, and style from TED talk speakers dreaming about a golden age to come. In our circles they tend to proclaim that "technology" is neutral. They are almost exclusively using the word "technology" as it is used in "technology-speak," as a buzzword for digital

communication devices such as iPads, projectors, and various social media outlets. Despite the claim that it is neutral, it is quite transparent that they do not think this in the least. Instead, they are giddy with ideas about these digital realities being gifts from God which He has given to us for the sake of evangelism, and that it would be wrong for us to not capitalize on their possibilities to reach the lost. Those who study technology and communication for a living have all noted strongly that these things are far from neutral. The medium is the message. Digital technology is neither good nor beneficial for learning, retention, or communication. It may be necessary to some degree in our age, but it is, nonetheless, harmful. For evidence of this, see the writings of Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Nicholas Carr, T. Gordon David, and Arthur W. Hunt III.

In a similar vein, it is common for these charlatans to talk about “learning styles,” despite the fact that the theory has been disproven again and again.¹ This debunked theory is often used to justify screens in Church, children’s sermon object lessons, electric guitars and drum sets, and a host of other cultural take-overs into the Divine Service.

These men are charlatans because they promise results but do not deliver. The reality is that their techniques have only ever had numerical success where there were demographics to make it so, that is, where there were large numbers of white people of mostly German or Norwegian descent. For the most part, their churches have grown by childbirth and transfer, not by baptizing thousands or even hundreds or even dozens of African-Americans, Latinos, or biker gangs. Not one Church Growth expert has been able to increase the size of the Michigan District or stop the numerical decline of synodical giving, let alone been successful in an actual inner-city environment. And yet, the synod and districts, and even circuits and congregations, have been inviting and paying these charlatans for advice and training for at least twenty-five years even though it has done nothing to stop the bleeding. Now, it could be, of course, that these charlatans do not realize that they have failed again and again, that their techniques have not delivered what they promised in our districts and synod, that they cannot produce results. If that is the case, I suppose they are morally innocent. They don’t mean to deceive. They actually believe in their own hype. But their visions of a golden age of church growth rely upon a culture of worry and fear and is patently false. Therefore, they are charlatans even if they are also themselves victims of their own hype. Thanks be to God, the truth is that the Lord will take care of His Church, and all of the elect will be saved, and pure doctrine is not a hindrance to evangelism or works of mercy.

If they are the charlatans of innovation-speak among us, who are the unnoticed heroes of the Church; who are

they who truly keep the Church going? They are the people who put money in the offering plate and say their prayers, who welcome the visitors and smile at the fussy babies during worship, who themselves have babies. They are those who come in on Saturdays to sweep the floor and trim the bushes and fix the toilet. They take care of the people and the building. The building is important. It is not only a place to gather for Word and Sacrament and fellowship. It is also an immovable testament to the world that Jesus lives, and His Church is still here whether they like it or not. Our buildings are a refuge for Christians, centers of holiness that feed, support, and train Christians to go out and be Christians in quiet, mostly unnoticed ways that actually make a difference in the world—not by dramatic disruptions and giant profits, but slow, incremental and steady work. The heroes are also the pastors who not only make disciples by baptizing and teaching but who also minister and keep those disciples as disciples by teaching and visiting and being a witness of the Gospel in life’s happy and unhappy times. They aren’t innovative or clever either. They simply plug along, doing what the Church has always done, what it is has been given to do.

It is not as exciting to repair an aging building or engage in preventive maintenance as it is to upgrade or install video conferencing capabilities or to install a fancy coffee bar, but the building itself, its plumbing and other mechanical systems, are far more essential to the mission of the Church than electronics and shiny new things. At times, I have witnessed congregations being guilted into giving to “missions” over taking care of their own building. This has been short-sighted and not stepping out in faith but rather a response to guilt. Of course, it is hard to measure the good the mission money did in those cases, and we trust that God works all things together for good, even our poor stewardship. Nonetheless, we are called to be good and faithful stewards and not wasteful with the Lord’s property, including what we sometimes think is “our” money.

While it is impossible to know what good money given to missions is, it is not at all difficult to see the exponential cost of deferred maintenance. Vinsel and Russel provide a great deal of evidence that maintenance sustains success and that preventive maintenance generates a whopping 545 percent return on investment (143). Maintenance, however, requires leadership and constant care. It won’t happen by accident, and it is not as exciting or interesting as foreign mission work. Therefore, we must advocate for it and recognize its goodness. None of that is to say that we shouldn’t give to missions. Rather it is to say that we should be unashamed to take care of and maintain what we have for the sake of the mission where we are. Let’s do the hard, slow work of Word and Sacrament and trust that God will make it grow.

Again, *The Innovation Delusion* is in no way theological. It works in categories somewhat foreign to us at first, but there is no doubt that the readers of *Gottesdienst* will see theological implications and resonance on nearly every page. The authors did not intend to write a religious book, but note how religious people have embraced it (222). Jews, Muslims, and Christians can all rally around the idea that humans were created, in some sense, in the image of the Creator and that He did not create things to be thrown away or consumed simply for pleasure. Adam and Eve were to maintain and care for the earth and all its creatures. From a more Christocentric point of view, there is a sense in which repairing things is not unlike redeeming or recreating them, and maintaining them is not unlike sanctification. To honor creation in its appropriate place and for its God-given use is to honor the Creator. This isn't to say that repairing a watch is preaching the Gospel. It isn't. Nor is it to equate a watch to a man's soul. As we teach the confessions, any time an innocent and possibly gentle gorilla gets a hold of a human baby, we shoot the gorilla. The point here is to notice that being a Christian, whose identity is in redemption, will cause a man to behave in ways that reflect his redemption and honor His creator. It will also cause him to view the substance of creation differently than an unbeliever does. So I urge you to get the book and read it. I do not think you will be disappointed. ✕

Notes

¹ See Furey, William, *The Stubborn Myth of "Learning Styles"* at <<https://www.educationnext.org/stubborn-myth-learning-styles-state-teacher-license-prep-materials-debunked-theory/>>.

Sabre of Boldness

Beware the Leaven of Hypocrisy¹

Jonathan E. Shaw



Sometimes you choose the text, other times the text chooses you. St. Luke begins chapter 12, verse 1, with the words, "In the meantime," which means, "at the same time as what was going on before." St. Luke often writes this way, tucking additional details in verses that follow. So, to understand this text we have to go back to the previous pericope. Perhaps it is *your* favorite—Jesus issuing six stinging woes against the Pharisees and lawyers, the so-called experts in Old Testament law.

A woe is not inherently a curse. A woe (ὠαί, in Greek) is an expression of grief or denunciation. On Jesus' lips here, it is essentially a curse, because it means that God is displeased with the Pharisees and lawyers, and denounces them for the pain, misery, and death they bring.

These are the six woes cast by Christ: "Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." That is, you make up your own works in place of the Ten Commandments, and thus cut out the heart of righteousness and love.

And again, "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces." That is, you serve to be given preference and noticed by man, not to walk humbly and be judged by God.

And again, "Woe to you! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." That is, you preach a doctrine that defiles the unsuspecting as if touching corpses and partaking of death.

And again, "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers." That is, you load up the law as dead weight, and withhold the one thing that would raise men up.

And again, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them." That is, you minister so as to persecute and bury the preachers of the Messiah, the apostles and prophets.

And finally, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." That is, you have taken away the Christ who opens the kingdom of heaven through His blood.

So, while Jesus over a period of time is speaking these woes to the Pharisees, His adversaries, He turns aside to His disciples, whom He calls His "friends," and in love sums up these woes in a singular warning, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." That is, you who believe in Me, be careful, for the doctrine of the Pharisees—hypocrisy—works in a seductively hidden way, which, over time, corrupts the whole loaf. Beware. It will corrupt you, and those who hear you.

This Biblical understanding of hypocrisy is different from the humanist understanding of hypocrisy, which conveys only fragmented truth. Self-oriented, sinful man usually conceives of the hypocrite as an individual whose outward actions do not line up with his inner heart. For example, you might say kind words, but if your heart wishes evil, if your words only serve to cover up who you really are, then you are a deceiver and a hypocrite. This approach measures one's actions against one's heart, is