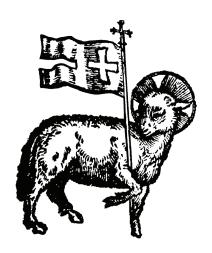


For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.

LEVITICUS 17:11



Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

HEBREWS 9:22

WITHOUT — the — SHEDDING of BLOOD

%^YO+O%*YO+O%*YO+O%*YO+O%*YO+O%*YO+O

THERE IS NO

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

DAVID P. SCAER

AD CRUCEM BOOKS

COLORADO, U.S.A.: M.M. XXIV.

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First edition



Dedicated to the sober-minded young men in our seminaries who earnestly desire to reflect a pattern of good works and to have the utmost integrity, reverence, and incorruptibility in their doctrine.

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ENDORSEMENT

ENDORSEMENT

THESE essays by Dr. David Scaer, under the heading "Without the Shedding of Blood," are a great read and a treasure in our Synod as the battle for the Bible as the true and inerrant word of God continues. The struggle to receive God's word in the Bible as His true and inerrant word has been going on since Satan asked Eve, "Did God actually say?" Satan's attack on God's word as the authority, rule, and norm for the doctrine and practice in Christ's Church has continued down through the years and was the central feature of the Reformation. The Bible as God's word was also at the center of the "walk out" at the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in 1974.

Dr. Scaer's essays champion the Bible as God's Word and address the doctrine of justification of sinners by the atoning work of Jesus as the central message of Scripture. As such, his essays are truly and faithfully biblical and Lutheran, and as always, very timely.

The reader will get a good account of some important history in our synod from a man who was there and also an objective and biblical evaluation of the issues framing discussions and controversies at the time.

God speaks of the work of such soldiers of the cross in His revelation recorded in the last book of the Bible, stating, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death," (Revelation 12:10b-11).

Dr. Ron M. Garwood

Ronald Garwod, D.D., Former President, The Wyoming District, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod; Immediate Past Chairman of the Board of Regents, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

ENDORSEMENT

FOREWORD

τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἶμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἀμαρτιῶν - ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΝ 26:28

"That is why you will never be one of us." The Rev. David P. Scaer, Summer 1997 If you have spent time in a classroom with or heard a paper given by the Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer, you know that the truth of Christ and humor go hand in hand. Of course, much of that biting humor is cause for self-examination for seminarians and seasoned pastors alike. Dr. Scaer wants to drive the "Lutheranism" out of his students, which is to say, the faulty presuppositions about the Word of God and the Scriptural faith confessed by the Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which have nothing to do with either.

Before I began my vicarage in the summer of 1997, I took a Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) Continuing Education course taught by Dr. Scaer on Christology. He asked me, "Why didn't you go to Ft. Wayne?" I recounted the story that the President of CTS from 1993-95 had made a visit to River Forest, where I was an undergraduate, under the pretense of encouraging the Pre-Seminary students to attend CTS. Instead, the message communicated was, "You guys should go to St. Louis because we don't know how much longer Ft. Wayne is going to be open." This is right in the face of the admissions counselor at Ft. Wayne, the Rev. George Lange, urging me to attend CTS because of the great need for confessional men to enroll, in no small part to help keep the place afloat. Dr. Scaer did not like my answer. His retort, "That is why you will never be one of us," hit hard, but it brought laughs out of the Ft. Wayne guys in the room. One of the pastors in the class tried to soften the blow a bit by asking him, "And where did you go to Seminary again?"

I could have made a vain attempt at a comeback, but I immediately began wondering who exactly the "us" was. Did he mean Ft. Wayne, guys? To be sure, but over the years, I have taken it to mean something more, and maybe Dr. Scaer did, too. By the week's end, Dr. Scaer gave me encouraging words, telling me that although I was a St. Louis guy, I would do just fine on vicarage. It was an East Coast one, and he probably knew there would be storms ahead for me; there were.

My advisor at St. Louis, the sainted Rev. Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, said that Ft. Wayne graduates of that era had "fire in the belly" because both theological and institutional trials had tested them and that we (St. Louis guys) might be blessed to have the same. To understand more of that trial in Dr. Scaer's life, I direct you to his memoirs, Surviving the Storms. St. Peter wrote, "Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven

genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:6-7). The griefs and trials make "us". Those who endure the storms of the Holy Ministry by simply telling the truth are true servants of Christ. Dr. Scaer has done so throughout his service to the Holy Church - he has told the truth from the Scriptures.

The essays contained in this volume show the truth being confessed and defended by Dr. Scaer. The vicarious satisfaction, which Francis Pieper called the "Concise epitome of what Scripture teaches on the work of Christ," is assailed today as in days gone by. Dr. Scaer made a proper confession and gave much-needed correction. The Law-Gospel debates, which raged in the 1960s and 1970s, focus now on the third use of the Law in both preaching and pastoral care. Reading Dr. Scaer, not only within this volume but throughout the corpus of his writings, will help to give clarity to those who desire to confess the truth for the glory of Christ and the salvation of men. Let Dr. Scaer be your teacher. That is, Dr. Scaer will have Christ teach you.

Francis Pieper wrote,

"All human teachers, whether they be the Apostles, or ministers, or all Christians, are only the instruments of Christ. John 20:21: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so I send you." And Paul emphatically reminds his hearers that it is "Christ speaking in me" (2 Cor. 13:3). Christ's Word and not the word of man, must be preached in the Church to the end of days. John 8:31-32; "If ye continue in My Word," etc.; 1 Tim. 6:3-5: "If any man...consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...he is proud." etc.; 1 Pet. 4:11: "If any many speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."

It is by means of His inspired Word that Christ, after his exaltation, executes his prophetic office here on earth. The Apostles not only spoke by inspiration, but they also wrote by inspiration (John 14:26; 16;13-15; 2 Cor. 13:3; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thes. 2:15) and thus were set up as infallible teachers and preachers (Eph. 4:11), but He has bound these men to the infallible Word of the Apostles, i.e., to His own Word, John 17:20. Finally, Christ fills all the Christians with spiritual wisdom and knowledge, enabling them to teach and admonish one another (John 7:38-39; Num. 11:29), but they base all their teaching not on their own wisdom, but on the Word of Christ. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). So, Christ is the sole Teacher of the Church; through the Church, He alone teaches the world to the end of days. The Word which the Church proclaims in executing the Great Commission is the Word of the Lord. "From you sounded out the Word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:8).

Any and all teaching within the visible Church which does not proclaim the Word of Christ is heresy, pseudo-prophecy, and the Church is absolutely forbidden to engage in such preaching."²

For Dr. Pieper and Dr. Scaer, and each of "us", it turns out that All Theology

¹ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), vol. II, p. 344

² Pieper, p. 340-341

is Christology. We are forbidden to engage in preaching that does not proclaim the Word of Christ. The Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer has been engaged by and in the Word of Christ for over six decades of service to the Holy Church, and he has, like Pieper before him in our Synod, identified heresy and pseudo-prophecy of all kinds. He has confessed before men, friends, and foes alike. All too often, many have had no desire to hear, but those who have heard found joy and delight in the teaching (and the banter), for they have heard Christ. Dr. Scaer has held the New Testament in Christ's Blood before us for the forgiveness of sins. The preaching of Christ must always come to the shedding of His blood, His atoning sacrifice, which God has accepted for the sins of the whole world. That doctrine is worth suffering for, worth going through the trials and the storms for. In fact, it creates them, and still, we preach it. It is the Word of Christ, the source and the content of our preaching and teaching, which makes "us" who we are, even as it has made Dr. Scaer who he is, to our joy, and even as he is cause for our thanksgiving to the LORD of Hosts.

The Rev. Benjamin Ball Holy Tuesday, 2024

Benjamin Ball, Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Worden, Illinois; Second Vice-President, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.



INTRODUCTION

Rev. Dr. Daniel Preus

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

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My first memory of David Scaer goes back to my childhood. I was ten years old and lived at 4 Seminary Terrace on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. From time to time, my parents would invite seminary students to their home to socialize and discuss the issues most important in the current life of the church. That afternoon, I was in the living room with my father, Robert Preus, David Scaer, and a couple of other students. My father was a professor at Concordia Seminary and David Scaer's advisor. At one point during the discussion (much of which I didn't understand), one of my younger brothers brandished a toy pistol, threatening to throw it at Dave Scaer. "Don't worry," my father said. "He won't do anything." Immediately, my brother threw the toy metal gun and hit Scaer smack in the head.

Whatever bruise resulted from that metal pistol surely disappeared within a few days. However, a few years ago, Dr. Scaer wrote a book indicating that the church is constantly being assaulted in ways that leave much more substantial bruises. *Surviving the Storms*, David's personal memoirs, revealed the turbulence within the church that Scaer himself closely observed, from the assault on Holy Scripture and the Gospel that characterized what was going on at the St. Louis seminary in the late 60's and early 70's to the bureaucratic crushing of Robert Preus in the early 90's when he was president of the Fort Wayne seminary. In his personal experience, David saw the attacks of Satan on God's church. But he also witnessed God's mercy and power in sustaining His church during hard and frightful times.

The articles in this book are more than just interesting theological treatises. They demonstrate the battles Scaer fought in the church militant. These battles were frequently, if not usually, Christocentric in nature. He was once attacked for his thesis that "All theology is Christology." But he never backed down from it. One of the essays in this book focuses on that specific matter. For Scaer, Christology was not simply one of several teachings that had something or perhaps nothing to do with each other. It was central to the understanding of all of Scripture. It was therefore appropriate, in view of his theology, that he authored the first volume published in the Luther Academy series, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics. It was the volume on Christology. At the beginning of that volume, he states, "If the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is the center of Christian theology, then Christology is the foundation upon which rest justification and all the other articles of faith. Only that doctrine of justification is Christian, which is based on the Christology revealed in the New Testament and later confessed by the ancient church in its creeds and confessions."

In his volume on Baptism, Volume XI in the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series, Scaer grounds Baptism in Christology. "The only solution in restoring to Baptism the

¹ David Scaer, Christology (The International Foundation of Lutheran Confessional Research, Inc., 1989) 1.

place of importance it has in the New Testament and the early church is understanding Baptism as a totally Christological act – an act or ritual in which Christ baptizes and in which the baptized Christian is joined to Christ's death and resurrection."²

In his volume Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace, Scaer typically defines the word Gospel Christologically. Toward the beginning of the book, as he defines the terms Law and Gospel, he says very simply that the Gospel teaches, "that Christ has atoned for all sins." Again, "gospel offers a completed salvation in Jesus Christ." And, "God's gracious activity in Jesus... and the proclamation by and about Jesus." In the section dealing with law and Gospel as the overarching teaching of the Scriptures, Scaer says, "The event of the cross is transposed into Gospel by the word of proclamation that Christ died for sins (1 Cor 15:3)." 6

The simple concept that Christ died for sins as central to the Gospel may seem elementary to many LCMS readers, but it is far from common among many modern liberal theologians. The articles in this volume, with their focus on justification and Law and Gospel, flow out of Scaer's doctrine of Christology.

When I was a student at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, the first class I took from David Scaer was entitled Christology. After that class, I took every class I could get from him. He had a style of teaching that compelled one to think theologically. He was not interested in simply having the student memorize historical facts or even theological axioms, important though they were. He wanted his students to understand. He wanted them to become thinking theologians. For that to happen, they needed to be grounded in Lutheran and biblical Christology.

The title of this book is *Without the Shedding of Blood, there is No Remission of Sins*. As firmly as Scaer insisted on the centrality of the doctrine of Christology, he also firmly insisted that the Christology of the Scriptures had the atonement effected by Jesus as its foundation. The faith of a Christian is directed toward the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross for the remission of sins. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. The faith of a Christian looks to the cross of Christ, where He shed His blood. The absolution of the pastor directs God's children to what Jesus did on the cross, namely that He shed His blood to accomplish the forgiveness of sins. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper offers to the sinner the body of Jesus crucified and His blood shed for the remission of sins. There is no Gospel that can comfort and sustain sinful people except that which is grounded in the atonement of Jesus for the sins of the world through the shedding of His blood on the cross.

Scaer was, therefore, a strong proponent of the doctrine of objective justification. The resurrection of Jesus is, as Walther once preached in a sermon on Mark 16, an absolution, in fact, the absolution of all humankind. In Jesus, sins have been atoned

² David Scaer, Baptism (Cresbard, SD: The Luther Academy, 1989) vol. xi, 201.

³ David Scaer, Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace (St. Louis: the Luther Academy, 2008) vol. viii, 3.

⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

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for, and this atonement took place in history, once and for all, in the death of Jesus. Apart from the objective absolution declared by Christ's resurrection, faith effectively becomes faith in itself rather than Christ. Does the sinner assure himself of his salvation based on his faith in Iesus or Iesus' death and resurrection? If it is the former. faith has no anchor other than its own self; if it is the latter, faith is anchored in the person and the work of Jesus, the Son of God. And that work took place specifically and in history on Golgotha under Pontius Pilate where Jesus shed His blood for the sins of the world. This is not to minimize the essential aspect of Jesus' active obedience, His fulfilling of the law on our behalf. But it is at the cross that Jesus' salvific work culminates. He suffers, sheds His blood for sins, dies, and declares, "It is finished." This is the message boldly asserted by the teaching of objective justification. "Your sins are forgiven, and this forgiveness flows from the wounds of Jesus. It is not dependent on faith, but faith grasps it in the proclamation of the atonement." David Scaer persists in his commitment to the doctrine of objective justification with its intense focus on the atonement of Jesus. Some of his most recent battles for the faith have involved unveiling the false teachings of those who understand the Christian faith as not grounded in atonement.

On several occasions, my father, Dr. Robert Preus, expressed his disappointment in those professors who never "produced." As teachers of the church, professors should not only be attending classes to instruct their students; they should also be writing to instruct the church at large. Just as pastors are responsible for identifying the temptations and afflictions that beset the members of their congregations and address them to comfort and strengthen the people, so professors ought to be identifying the attacks being made against the church and writing articles and books to help the church withstand the attacks of the devil and the sinful world. This was his viewpoint. But he never made this complaint about David Scaer. David has been prolific in his writing of major books, such as those written in the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series, and in the journals of the church, such as the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* and *LOGIA*. He has been a frequent speaker in the church at the *Congress on the Lutheran Confessions* and the annual symposium at CTS, congregational and circuit and district gatherings, and many other settings.

He now speaks to us again in the pages of this book. He continues to assist the church in her battles as she awaits the return of her Lord in glory. In his first chapter, he dismantles the error of Paul Bretscher, who was unwilling to identify the Scriptures as the written Word of God in their entirety. In a later chapter, he explains what it means to say that all theology is Christology. He describes the errors that result when this statement is misunderstood and the consequences for a church that is not committed to this axiom. Throughout this volume, he preaches to the reader the messages needed by the church at this present hour.

David Scaer had the habit (and probably still does) of teasing his students by referring to them as dead orthodox, but when it comes right down to it, Scaer has spent his entire career defending the orthodox Christian and Lutheran confession. He

is surely one of the most important theologians of the Missouri Synod in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Until the return of our Lord, we live in the church militant. We are grateful for the clear proclamation of those who, by God's grace, equip us in the battles we face as God's children. In this book, Scaer continues his task as a teacher of the church, and we in the church thank God again for this faithful teacher.

Daniel Preus March 17, 2024

Daniel Preus, D.D., Former First Vice-President, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod; Former Director, Concordia Historical Institute.



THE LAW GOSPEL DEBATE IN THE MISSOURI SYNOD

(December 1972)

The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod

DECEMBER 1972

In the last twelve months or so a controversy of considerable proportions over the Law-Gospel theme has arisen in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Gross confusion has been caused because of the profusion of articles circulating throughout the Synod. The controversy between two basically opposed sides, simmering in the Missouri Synod since the end of the 1940's and the early 1950's, came to public attention when the pot began to boil over in 1971. Dr. Robert Schultz is right in his observation that,

Since the Altenburg debate, no controversy has been of such significance as the current discussion in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod about its understanding of the Scripture.¹

It is safe to assume that the opponents in the matter would have continued to engage in small skirmishes, as they had been doing for the last twenty years, if Dr. J. A. O. Preus had not released *The Report of the Synodical President*. With *The Report, the* gauntlet was thrown down and both sides began to gather themselves in battle formation for the final conflict. In the fray of battle, it has been more difficult to identify the issues than the combatants. Both sides, in an attempt to rally forces to their respective sides, have raised the same standards (at differing levels, however) in an attempt to gain additional troops from the uncommitted or the perennial political fence sitters who are waiting to see which way the wind will blow before they jump.

There is always sadness when the church engages in controversy, but there is a refreshing note in that the Missouri Synod is finally being honest with itself. Dr. Leigh Jordahl has pointed out that, before the election of Dr. Preus, Missouri Synod leaders were issuing statements affirming that Missouri had not changed when in fact it had. Both sides are claiming to be the true "Zion on the Mississippi."

Perhaps a word to those who have pastoral concerns about church controversy, especially about the present controversy, would be in order. First of all, the church of Jesus Christ will never live without this kind of controversy, at least not on this side of eternity. Jesus gave warnings about the coming of false teachers and spoke of the necessity of offenses. This is a kind of negative prophecy. The New Testament arose in part because the apostles had to speak to doctrinal troubles in the church. We are never to be exempt from these kind of trials. Secondly, in church controversies both sides profess explicit loyalty to God, Jesus, the Bible, etc. Which church combatants ever appeared on the field of battle as explicit apostates? Thirdly, and this is a psychological side affect, there is something healthy about talking man-to-man on the issues. There is something sick about pretending there is nothing wrong when many secretly feel

^{1 &}quot;Reflections on the Current Controversy in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: An Attempt to Express Pastoral Concern," Cresset (October 1972), p. 3.

that there are some real difficulties. After it is all over and the dust settles, we might have a more robust church and mentally healthier clergy. In the opinion of this writer, there was something absurd about always avoiding the contemporary issues and instead fighting theological battles in the pages of the 17th century dogmaticians. At least those unjustly maligned theologians faced their contemporary situation with a contemporary theology! Let it be said that if one side allegedly is only representation, the other side has gladly galloped back to the 17th century to do battle. A perfect case in point is Paul G. Bretscher's, "The Log in Your Own Eye" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XLIII (November 1972) pp. 645-686. Dr. Bretscher, who writes to the present Law-Gospel controversy, refers to the 17th century Lutheran Orthodox theology via Dr. Robert Preus's *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* in 18 out of 32 footnotes! This has not helped the situation because the center of controversy becomes Quenstedt's theology and not the church's present problems. Yes, the church stands on the past. But maybe the Missouri Synod will again be able to stand on her own two feet in facing the present.

The Lutheran Confessions do not usually make it a point to name opponents in a controversy; however, this article does not aspire to such pretentious status, it might be not only permissible but helpful to see where the lines are beginning to emerge, especially when the combatants have identified themselves. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, his fact finding committee, the five dissenting professors from St. Louis, certain members of the Springfield faculty, and Dr. Horace Hummel, all share a certain common ground. The majority of the St. Louis faculty, including its president, Dr. John Tietjen, are the rallying point for the opposing position. To unravel the situation in its totality now simply is not possible, because the job of convincing and recruiting is still furiously going on. The position of Dr. Preus is The Fact Finding Report. The other side speaks through the Concordia Theological Monthly, Lutheran Forum and the Cresset. (Do not let the reader get the idea that this writer intends to turn every stone over. This is simply impossible. In the heat of battle, who can write a history of the whole war.) The position opposing Dr. Preus could be called the "Valparaiso Theology"² because many of its original and major proponents in the Missouri Synod have been associated with that university. Thus Dr. Edward Schroeder, writer of "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the LCMS,"3 was formerly chairman of the department of theology at Valparaiso University. Dr. Paul G. Bretscher, writer of the "Log in Your Own Eye'," held that position before Dr. Schroeder did and is now pastor of a congregation there. Dr. Robert C. Schultz wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Law-Gospel theme in 19th century German Lutheran Theology⁴ and is now a member of the theology department.

² The phrase the "Valparaiso Theology" is coined merely for the sake of convenience. Identifying theology with a place where it has prominently appeared can be traced back to the earliest post-apostolic times. Antioch, Alexandria, Geneva, St. Louis, Mercersberg, and even Springfield suggest a theological approach. This does not mean that everyone at the locality holds an even near similar theology or that such a theology cannot be found elsewhere. The Erlangen Theology of the 19th century is a case in point.

³ Concordia Theological Monthly, XLII (April 1972), pp. 232-247.

⁴ Gesetz und Evangelium (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlaghause, 1958).

He has contributed two articles recently to *The Cresset*⁵ on the matter. These men tend to depend upon each other as authorities.

What exactly is the nature of the controversy of the Law-Gospel in the Missouri Synod today? The position of Dr. Preus is that the Sacred Scriptures are the source of all doctrines to be taught in the Church. These teachings if used according to the principles laid down in the Bible itself will convict the sinner of his sin (the Law) and will lead him to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as his personal Savior from sin (the Gospel). The "Valparaiso Theology" holds that Gospel, as the preached good news about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins, is the basis of theological work. It also holds that the Scriptures when used by themselves can lead to conflicting opinions and thus the Gospel as the presupposition of Faith must be used in approaching the Scriptures.

In describing such a sensitive controversy and to do justice to both positions it might be best to cite Dr. Bretscher's article. The first quotation is Dr. Preus's and the second Dr. Bretscher's, which summarizes his own stance.⁷

Once again, which of the following captures the mind of our Confessions? "He who knows the Scripture has a divine given wisdom which guides him to faith in Christ and thus to salvation"? Or its inversion, "He who knows Christ by faith and thus has salvation has a divinely-given wisdom which guides him to know the Scriptures"? (See Luke 24:36-45!)

The problem is basically one of epistemology, or how I know about Jesus Christ. Dr. Preus's position is that the Scriptures tell me about Jesus Christ, i.e., the Gospel. Dr. Bretscher's position which is representative of the "Valparaiso theology" is that my faith in Jesus directs me to the Bible. Let's state the opposing positions in this way.

Dr. Preus's position:

(1) Scriptures, written, spoken, preached or paraphrased, tell me about sin (Law)

⁵ Op. cit. In the same issue is the second article by Dr. Schultz, "Missouri Synod History and Doctrine: Variant Readings," pp. 29-33.

⁶ A lucid example of this approach is given in Concord, No. 1, edited by H. Huxhold, E. Brueggemann and P. Harms. The Overarching principle is the Gospel for Biblical interpretation. The first issue contains the article "Sola Scripture is the Gospel Alone." (The title is neither good Latin nor good English.) The basic argument is this. The historical critical methodology does have some dangers since it can lead denial of historicity. The literal method is a risk since it has resulted in Millennialism, Pentecostalism, Seventh Day Adventism, etc. The solution to the dilemma is the "Gospel" which we were to learn from the Lutheran Confessions is the key to studying Bible. Whether or not the writers are aware that they have elevated the Confessions over and above the Scriptures is hard to say. Dr. F. E. Mayer seems to have been impressed by a similar argument brought up by the German theologians at Bad Boll. The Story of Bad Boll (St. Louis: Concordia, 1949), p. 26. "It is possible to believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and yet promulgate gross doctrinal error (example of Roman Church or the Millennialist)." In the "Valparaiso Theology" the question of the origin of the "Gospel" remains basically unanswered. If the Bible is the origin of one's knowledge of the Gospel, then this is Dr. Preus's position which is anathematized. For the Germans at Bad Boll, it seems to have been the product of their religious culture which happened to be "Lutheran." In other words, Lutherans determine what Lutherans believe about the Bible. This seems to be the same kind of circle that Bultmann gets himself into when he refrains from making judgments on others who are not in his circle. The astute reader will recognize that this procedure puts the church over the Scriptures, even if what the church says happens to be right for the moment. But didn't Luther find the Church of Rome wanting on that very point? For Scriptures determine what the Scriptures says and no independently arrived at abstract principle.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 667.

and lead me to faith in Christ (Gospel). Dr. Preus certainly would not deny but obviously believes that faith leads one back to Scripture in accord with the command of Christ as Dr. Bretscher also holds by pointing to Luke 24:36-45.

Dr. Brescher's opposition:

(2) He who has faith in Christ or a divinely given wisdom will know the Scripture. Faith in the Gospel precedes any commitment to Scriptures or any form of them, e.g., a paraphrase.⁸ It is a circle that can be joined at any point.

The position of Dr. Preus is that the Scriptures are the cognitive principle in theology, i.e., they tell us about Christ. Therefore, everything taught in the church must be derived from the Scriptures and ultimately serve Jesus Christ. The position of Dr. Bretscher, Schroeder, and Schultz is that the Gospel is permissible in the church. The first position has been labeled legalistic and Calvinistic and the second, Gospel reductionism.⁹

In practice, as experience shows, nothing is found contrary to the Gospel. An example of how this procedure works is the stance of Dr. Schroeder in approving the ordination of women pastors. While he agrees that Paul forbids women the role of pastor and acknowledges that Paul calls on Jesus as an authority in the matter, he claims that the practice is permissible because it is not contrary to the Gospel.

The basis of theology is shifted from what Scripture says to what the Gospel allows. Everything becomes adiaphora with the only restriction possible offense to others. This highlights the argument. Who or what teaches the church? Jesus Christ through the prophets and apostles, and hence the Scriptures? Or Jesus Christ through faith?

Some six years ago I spoke specifically to this matter in *Christianity Today*¹² before and apart from any discussion of it in the Missouri Synod. I will take the chance of being rightfully criticized for self-quotation in order to stave off the attacks of being called "reactionary."¹³

⁸ Op. cit.

⁹ Horace Hummel, "Law and Gospel in the Old Testament." Mimeographed Pastoral Conference Essay, p. 4. Presumably for pastors in the Indiana District.

[&]quot;The LCA is a perfect example of what happens when one abandons all possible thought of discipline, refuses to state what is being *rejected* as well, and appeals to the 'adequacy of the historic confessions' or simply to 'Gospel': these become code words for *anything goes*; in the *practice* anything contrary to the Gospel simply *will* never be found, etc."

^{10 &}quot;The Orders of Creation - Some reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology" Concordia Theological Monthly, XLII (March 1972), pp. 165-178.

Adiaphora defined by the Formula of Concord, X, deal with the problem of Christian liberty in matters not commanded by God. The situation determines whether it is proper to exercise such liberty. The Scriptures determine commands of God. In the newer theology, the "Gospel" takes the place of the Scriptures. Where the "Gospel" does not speak, liberty is allowed. The effect is twofold. The Gospel becomes the norm of the Christian life and thus becomes Law. Or the Gospel has no normative function and moral and doctrinal freedom results. This entire problem resulted from Werner Elert's clash with Karl Barth, as will be shown below.

¹² Vol. XII, 3, (November 10, 1967), pp. 113f.

^{13 &}quot;Reactionary" would be mild in comparison with other verbiage used in the controversy. Dr. Bretscher can leave no other impression than that he has called Dr. Preus a "hireling" ("News Letter-Supplement," Immanuel Lutheran Church, Valparaiso) and has implied that Dr. Preus is a hypocrite. In his article on "The Log in Your Own Eye," the log is the theology of Dr. Preus, traditional orthodoxy. Jesus applied these words originally to the hypocrites. Dr. Bretscher speaks

This offer of a choice between Christ and the Bible is not only misleading – it is downright deceptive. It is certainly not suggested by the Scriptures themselves ... No real choice can ever be made between Christ and the Bible, simply because the Bible centers in Christ and he submits himself totally to it. Christ is the chief content of the Bible and also the only key to its interpretation.

As I understand Dr. Bretscher's approach, he approaches the Bible with a faith in Christ, but never defines the exact origin of this faith, except maybe as a direct gift of the Holy Spirit. But is there really any difference between this opinion and those of Luther's opponents the Zwickau prophets, who received revelations directly from God? That Dr. Bretscher can even suggest this kind of approach is amazing, since he has opposed the charismatic movement which claims for itself a type of Christ-revelation apart from the Holy Scriptures. But isn't this exactly what Dr. Bretscher claims for himself when he states that to know the Scriptures one must know Christ *first*? But whence does he know Christ?

In putting the pieces of a puzzle together, analysis of the historical circumstances is not without some benefit. Dr. Edward Schroeder in his article "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod" has provided a description of historical roots. His reconstruction is based in part on F. E. Mayer's *The Story of Bad Ball*. After World War II, Missouri Synod leaders arranged a series of theological conferences with leaders of the German Lutheran churches. This is not the place to recount the whole story, though it appears that the Law-Gospel controversy of the 1970's had its origin then, in the late 1940's, as Dr. Schroeder indicates.

Strange as it might seem, it was the decision to use the Augsburg Confession as the basis for discussion between the Missourians and the Europeans that eventually precipitated our difficulties today, some twenty-five years later. The German theologians attempted to show that they could be good Lutherans without an apriori commitment to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. (This theme is repeated in Dr. Bretscher's recent essay.) Dr. F. E. Mayer seems to have been impressed by the arguments of the German theologians and began to integrate certain accents into his theology, as Dr. Schroeder also points out. This does not mean that Dr. Mayer surrendered or denied any of the Synod's teachings; however, there was a subtle shift which even he might not have been totally aware. These sentences from Dr. Mayer are characteristic of his new-found approach. "The doctrine of the inspiration does not stand in the relationship of *apriori*, but of *aposteriori* to our theology. It is not the broad basis upon which the pyramid of dogmatics is built up." 14

them to Dr. Preus. Other words used by others have been 'Caiaphas,' 'Herod,' unLutheran and subLutheran. The last is the kindest and predicates of Dr. Preus a view held after Luther' death.

^{14 (}St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), p. 14. The theology of Dr. F. E. Mayer should become the topic of further historical research. Dr. Edward Schroeder is correct in assigning to him the place of prime importance in the theological change in the Missouri Synod. Schroeder's article "Law-Gospel Reductionism" might be the first step in the investigation. E. Clifford Nelson makes a similar assessment concerning the Missouri Synod's representatives at Bad Boll. "These men (H. Bornkamm, Schlinck, Elert, Thielicke and Koberle) forced the Americans (Mayer, Fuerbringer, Baepler, Behnken) to look again at their teaching of verbal inspiration, and although no conversions were evident, the Missouri Lutherans were made aware of the intellectualistic, legalistic, and docetic dangers of the doctrine." Lutheranism in North America 1914-1970 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), p. 172.

Though the statement was written more than twenty years ago, it must be studied. It has never been the position of the Missouri Synod that a person had to have any formalized doctrine of the Bible, verbal inspiration or otherwise, before believing in Jesus Christ. Of course, this is a favorite type of accusation brought against the traditionally understood orthodox position. Nevertheless, the person hearing words about Jesus is convinced, at least implicitly, that God is speaking a message to him. In fact, in the prior proclamation of the Law, God does address man apart from Jesus Christ. Such a man is brought to an awareness that there is a God and that this God does have demands laid down in the Law. Barth, like Bretscher, held that Christ must be known first. Hence Law-Gospel becomes Gospel-Law.

Therefore, Mayer might be correct in stating that verbal inspiration is not the *apriori* for theology, but he is wrong if he is suggesting that God and His word are not. The theological task, not to be confused with the missionary task of the church, is begun by everyone, orthodox or otherwise, with *apriori* opinion of what the Bible is or is not.

What Mayer had imbibed without knowing it was the last remnants of the Erlangen Theology of the 19th century which Dr. Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* treated vigorously. The Erlangen Theology had adopted Lutheran doctrine but with Schleiermacher's underpinnings – "theology of feeling." Pieper and the Erlangen theologians could agree on many facets of the "what" of the theology, but they did not agree on how they got there. Paul Tillich's criticisms of the Erlangen Theology are even more pointed than Pieper's. ¹⁵

Werner Elert, who out of the all the Bad Ball conferees on the German side would make the biggest impression on the Missourians, was part of the Erlangen tradition. He had been a pastor and professor in the Breslau Synod, a church body that has grown closer and closer to the Missouri Synod. He also appeared as a chief attacker of Karl Barth on the matter of the Law and the Gospel.

Elert's essay Law and Gospel¹⁶ was a direct reply to Barth's Gospel and Law. All this

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. l, p. 42. "In a similar way his (Schleicrrnacher's) followers, notably the Lutheran 'School of Erlangen', which included the theologians Hoffmann and Frank, tried to establish an entire system of theology by deriving the contents from the experience of the regenerated Christian. This was all illusion, as Frank's system clearly proves." With only slight adjustment, this assessment might, also apply to the "Valparaiso Theology." Dr. Pieper calls attention to the "regenerate I" on the first page of his dogmatics. Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I. p.3.

¹⁶ Translated by Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). The influence of Werner Elert on current Missouri Synod theology cannot be overestimated. Perhaps a slight historical reconstruction is possible here. Dr. F. E. Mayer and others met with the German theologians in the late 1940's. There contact was made with Elert. As Dr. Schultz graduated from St. Louis in 1952, it can be assumed that he entered Concordia Seminary there in 1947. Thus, he was at the seminary during the very years that Dr. Mayer was in contact with Elert. Mayer might have been a decisive influence in Dr. Schultz's going to Erlangen to study under Elert. Elert died in 1955 before Schultz completed his Doctor's degree in the year 1956 under Paul Althaus, who was not as conservatively Lutheran as was Elert, in the opinion of this writer. It seems that Robert Schultz's doctoral dissertation was suggested by Elert to support what he had written on pages 1 and 2 of his Law and Gospel. In other words, Elert had an idea for which he wanted historical research from the 19th century. This Schultz did. Dr. Schultz also brought Althaus's theology to America by translating his The Theology of Martin Luther and The Ethics of Martin Luther. The task of translating Elert's Law and Gospel fell to Dr. Edward H. Schroeder, who had been at Valparaiso University since the late

endeared Elert to the Missourians. But the elevation of "Law-Gospel" as the controlling theological theme was the very weakness in Elert's position. The Missourians did not determine that Elert had provided no base for his theology apart from a functional use of the Scriptures and Luther.¹⁷ Elert like Barth had a Scripture divorced from history. Elert was in fact a "Lutheran Barthian." His "Law-Gospel" principle hung suspended in theological thin air, almost in the same fashion as the Erlangen theology a century before.¹⁸

Mayer was undoubtedly impressed that German Lutheran theology could be Lutheran, and confessional at that, while at the same time it could warn about the Calvinistic "dictation theory." Mayer also seems to have to assented to the German concept that the Scriptures must be approached first from a Christocentric viewpoint and secondarily from inerrancy. This is also the opinion of Dr. Schroeder in "Law-Gospel Reductionism," pp. 243-246. As previously mentioned, neither of the alternatives,

1950's. In a completely unrelated way, Dr. Norman Nagel, then at Cambridge, translated another work by Elert, published as *Eucharist and Church Fellowship* (CPH, 1966) an excellent work which is not received by a wide audience. It is basic reading for fellowship discussions. Here Elert has been regretfully overlooked. In addition, Concordia Publishing House in 1962 published *Structure of Lutheranism*. The forward was contributed by Jaroslav Pelikan and a biographical essay by Dr. Schultz. Dr. Schroeder also translated a book on death by Prof. Thielicke, another participant at Bad Boll. Thus, beginning with Dr. Mayer, Elert along with others at Bad Boll has had a strong influence in the Missouri Synod, however a careful analysis of his theology for our pastors is still to be written.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Elert questioned the Third Use of the Law as being out of harmony with Luther's theology, though it is stated in the Formula of Concord VI. As a reaction to Barth, who saw that the Gospel prepares someone to keep the Law, Elert held that the Law comes first after which a person enjoys Gospel freedom. In the 1980's it became customary for many to lecture against the Third Use of the Law. In my opinion Elert did not have a developed theology on this point because of the encounter with Barth. However, it was Elert's concept of the Christian living under freedom which has led eventually to the concept that the Gospel determines procedures in the Christian life. Wilfred Joest did go on to write a dissertation to show that Luther did have what we call a third use of the Jaw. (Gesetz und Freiheit) [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck, 1951].

In all of these matters the name of Calvin is brought in as a legalistic type of whipping boy. He is blamed for mechanical or verbal inspiration, third use of the law, and the orders of creation. Whether he is guilty as charged we will leave to the historical jurors. Still, it is a type of slander to suggest continually that one's opponents are 'Calvinists.' Strange those who make such charges which do justice neither to Calvin or those charged are not willing to condemn his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, especially in the matter of the recent Leuenberg Concord. Here we can really tell who the *true* Lutherans are.

- 17 One example of the historical approach of Elert was that the German theologians played Luther against the Lutheran Confessions. Dr. Mayer writes: "Dr. Elert maintained furthermore that the recent Luther studies, especially those of Karl Holl, have shown that Lutheran Confessions show a deviation from Luther. German scholars therefore are interested more in the study of Luther than of the Confessions." Op. cit., p. 16. Here is an example of how the German theologians determined what was "Lutheran." If deviation between Luther and the Confessions did exist, the only way to resolve it would be to make a judgment on the basis of the Scriptures. This was not the way the problem was handled. The end result of pitting Luther and the Confessions against each other was that Luther was to represent a pristine Lutheranism, Melanchton a deviation, and the Formula of Concord a calcified deviation. This method has been used by von Harnack in the study of the New Testament. For others the F.C. is Luther's theology in Melanchton's language.
- 18 Not each influence in Dr. Bretscher's position can be recognized, but some can. Thus, he does speak very much like the Dr. Preus himself when he says, "In or out of the event comes the Word to which faith clings, but the event in itself is visible. Christian proclamation and doctrine did not create the event, neither can doctrine defend, preserve, or authenticate the history of the event. The event is historical because it really happened, and it is historical the way it really happened. Out of that visible and experienced history comes (sic!) the proclamation and the doctrine." Within the context of the present theology, this is a very conservative statement and a least in the matter of history puts him on the side of Dr. Preus. The lines of controversy in the Missouri Synod are not as clean cut as some would like.

as stated, are really aprioris in a cold approach to the Scriptures. Mayer had all the parts of Missouri's theology; he arranged them differently and thus changed it, perhaps.

Just what is a "Lutheran Barthian"?¹⁹ A "Lutheran Barthian" is a theologian who accepts Lutheran theology simply because it is Lutheran without insisting that such a theology be connected with an authentically validated word of God, i.e., the Scriptures.²⁰ The one outstanding characteristic of Barthanism is that it performs theology without confronting the historical questions. It immerses itself in the "Word" and pretends that hard questions of history are not there. Not even the most profound forms of 19th century liberalism did that.

"Lutheran Barthianism" does not differ essentially from Barth's suspended "Word" theology characterized by Charles Ryrie as "the faith of the New Testament without the facts." It only insists that the "Word" be understood in a Lutheran way instead of a Calvinistic way. It is no wonder that the Missourians must have been impressed with the way their German counterparts had attacked Barth for his perversion of "Gospel-Law."

Dr. Schroeder is rightfully hesitant in rendering a clear verdict in the matter of Mayer. He certainly was impressed by Elert and others. Regardless, the primacy of the Christocentric approach to the Scriptures without the apriori of a formal principle, i.e., "Is there a God who speaks to me?" was deceptively appealing to many. Barth's Christomonism is frequently mistaken for the Lutheran Christocentrism. Dr. Bretscher in his recent article stands consciously in the line with Elert's "Lutheran Barthian" approach, more so than Mayer did; but of course, this is open to debate. There was something appealing to many Missouri Synod pastors in the slogans of the "Lutheran Barthianism." "Law and Gospel," "Christocentric," "Solum Evangelium," all had the true ring of Luther, Walther, and Pieper. After all Luther had spoken about Christ being the key to the Scriptures. "Law and Gospel" was the name of both a section of the grandest of the Lutheran Confessions, the Formula of Concord, and also of a book that Walther wrote. But few seem to give serious consideration to how a person came to know about Christ or to have faith, so that he could then read the Scriptures with understanding. Luther's answer was that knowledge about Christ, or Gospel, if you will, came from the Bible. There was something desperate in "Lutheran Barthianism" as it settled in the Missouri Synod. "Proof-texting" was out and the "Kierkegaardian leap" was in. Something was afoot in the Missouri Synod. "Lutheran

¹⁹ Nelson uses the term "neo-Lutheranism." Op. Cit. Cf. Note 15.

Dr. Elert, a co-essayist at the first conference at Bad Boll, showed that the Augsburg Confession in America was a religious document but in Germany it was a political one also. This was mentioned as by Elert to indicate different theological approaches. (Op,. cit. pp. 15f.) Elert was not alone in attributing a type of sub-religiosity to the Germans, who happened to be culturally Lutheran. The proclamation of the "death of God" several years ago was based on this cultural concept of religion. God was dead, because He was not culturally discernible anymore. The Germans were amazed at the confessional and financial strength of the Missouri Synod, which was considered the bearer of traditional "dead orthodoxy." (Op. cit. p. 8) In reading through Mayer's account of Bad Boll, one is forced constantly to ask why two church groupings knew so little about each other and why they were that way. Almost childlike amazement characterizes the printed report. Wasn't anybody in the Missouri Synod reading any books in the previous decades?

Barthianism" brought with it an ahistorical approach because it never really could answer the question of how we know the Gospel. Just believe, no questions, please. Questions were labeled as rationalistic. As a reaction to this "Lutheran Barthisnism" the Synod during the subsequent years began to pass as a matter of rote one doctrinal resolution after another. A foreign body had entered the blood stream of the Synod and the Synod simply was not prepared to handle it. The "Lutheran Barthianism" was simply immune to inerrancy resolutions or the like. The Synod had no antibodies to fight this new disease.

Perhaps Lutheran Orthodoxy has unwittingly prepared the way for Lutheran Barthianism. Both types of theology put the stress on the "Word." With what seemed to be the same flag for two opposing sides, no wonder the soldiers became confused. The Brief Statement, with its inclusion of history, geography, etc. under the inerrancy of Scripture seemed to suggest to many that the Missouri Synod simply was not willing to deal with embarrassing historical questions. It was a kind of "The Bible has settled it. Don't ask any questions" approach. Just believe! Of course, this is what Barth and Lutheran Barthianism was also saying: "Just believe!"

Putting the historical pieces together in the 1950's and 1960's is impossible here. Bad Boll meant not only a limited theological exchange of ideas but also a culture exchange, regretfully a one sided one. A stream of students began studying under the German participants of the conferences. The most notable was Dr. Robert C. Schultz, a St. Louis graduate and presumably a student of Dr. Mayer, now an LCA clergyman and professor in the department of theology at Valparaiso University. He went to the University of Erlangen to do his doctoral work under Elert. After Schultz had completed four chapters of his dissertation, Elert died and Schultz continued his work under Althaus. The title of Schultz's published dissertation was Gesetz und Evangeliunz, Law and Gospel! It was an attempt to provide the historical background for the twentieth century discussion by discussing this theme in 19th century theology.

Schultz seems to be the first to attempt in a scholarly way to understand Missouri Synod history in the light of this theme. Walther, who had written a book with the same title, seemed the worthiest victim for this dogmatican approach to history in the light of the Law-Gospel motif. As Schultz points out, Walther did not use the Law-Gospel motif as the penetrating principle of his theology. Walther still held to a static and not a dynamic use of the principle and at that it was limited to practical theology. Schultz sees applying the Law-Gospel theme to exegetical and systematic theology as the most important task of American theology. Schultz's mandate was printed in 1958, about ten years after Bad Boll and fifteen years before the present controversy in the

²¹ Memorials on doctrinal and fellowship matters covered 166 pages at the last convention of the Missouri Synod. Theology in the Missouri Synod has become truly congregationalized since both sides are long to the congregations to render the final verdict.

²² Gesetz und Evangelium, p. 168. "Damit ist eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben der Intherischen Theologie in Amerika gegeben: Gesetz und Evangelium ebenso zum Grundprinzip ihrer exegetischen und ihrer systematischen Theologie zu machen, wie es dlurch Walther zum Grundprinzip der praktischen Theologie erhohen worden ist." In a recent mimeographed copyrighted but still unpublished essay, Dr. Schultz might be setting down his procedures. First, he rightly deplores the lack of exegetical preaching among Lutheran clergy. Then he mentions the conflicting exegetical results. In this dilemma he suggests that what might be called the surface meaning of the text be preached, regardless of the recent historical research. This two-level theology is reminiscent of Karl Barth which separate the historical-theological task from the preaching task.

Missouri Synod. One cannot but gain the impression that Schultz approved of Elert's "Lutheran Barthianism" and saw it as a corrective for Lutheranism in our country.

As mentioned above, Schultz has maintained momentum in his propagation of the theory and has been joined by Dr. Schroeder and Bretscher. Dr. Schroeder traced the theme through the Missouri Synod and in a later article showed how, on the basis of the Gospel, no opposition could be made against the practice of the ordination of women pastors. In his article "The Log in the Eye," Dr. Bretscher summons the Missouri Synod to rid itself, through radical surgery, if necessary, of a theology that asks for a commitment to the Bible before asking for a commitment to Christ. This theology is the log!

This unfortunate "either-or" theology was the same as that with which Mayer was confronted at Bad Boll in the forties by the German theologians, but in a much more courteous and generous way! According to Bretscher – and this is basically Schroeder's approach – "true" or "false" teaching is not to be judged on the norm of the Scripture but rather by the word of the Cross, or the Gospel. The "Gospel" approach is the correct one to take in regard to Synod's present problems. Bretscher certainly does not approve of what he calls liberal theology, but this is of considerably less magnitude, labeled merely as "specks" in the eye. It is certainly Dr. Bretscher's intention to indicate that Dr. Preus's group has such large "logs" of orthodoxy in their eyes that they are totally unqualified to handle the liberal specks. (The reader, acquainted with Dr. Bretscher's approach, will recognize this use as allegory – a use condemned by Luther! Hopefully this is not exemplary of his ordinary use of Scriptures. If it is, all truth will have evaporated into an allegorical mist.

Another mark of the "Lutheran Barthian" approach is that, in the "Law-Gospel" scheme, even the Law is dissolved by the Gospel. Schultz claims that the Law is contrary to the Gospel.²³ Yes, this is so, but only in the eyes of the sinner. What God requires of us in the Law, He gives us in the Gospel. How can God both demand and give? The contradiction does not exist for God, who in Jesus Christ fulfills the Law. Christ lived according to the Law because this was impossible for us. Christ died to fulfill the Law's penalties placed on us. It is not as Schultz says that the Law is set aside by the Gospel. The Gospel has in fact confirmed God's righteousness and holiness in the Law.

Both Schultz and Schroeder turn Gospel into Law. The Gospel becomes the moral norm of the Christian life. Thus, murder is a sin not because it infringes upon the Fifth Commandment but rather because it contradicts the Gospel or as Schultz puts it, "God's rule in my heart through the forgiveness of sins." Does Schultz mean to imply that there are different moral standards for regenerate and unregenerate man? For the first, the Gospel and the other, the Law? Dr. Schultz has no difficulty quoting FC V, "Law and Gospel", but apparently has refused to continue reading further to FC VI, on "Third Use of the Law," which states that the law is the norm (not the

^{23 &}quot;Missouri Synod History and Doctrine," p. 32.

motivating power) for the Christian life.²⁴ The procedure of Schultz and Schroeder is to turn the Gospel into Law, thus denying the very Gospel which they profusely honor.

In practice the "Gospel" as regulating principle in the Christian life is little more than a spiritualized pragmatism. What the Gospel demands of me is really determined by me. As Schultz points out the overriding question is whether or not God is speaking to me. 25 Is it God's word to me? Thus Dr. Schroeder realizes that Paul *does* prohibit women in the pastoral office, but these words are not spoken to me. Schultz can sweep the question of the talking serpent under the rug with the same type of procedure. The Gospel principle turns out to be a *carte blanche* for moral and doctrinal freedom. 26

This new devotion to the Law-Gospel principle is causing a great deal of confusion. The following will have to be expanded in another issue, but something must be said to set the record straight. Dr. Schultz is correct in recognizing that the Law-Gospel in Walther's theology was a principle for practical theology and not an exegetical or systematic principle. It is a principle of the application of God's word to people and not a principle of understanding what God's word says. It is a principle that comes out of God's word and then serves to enlighten everything which God has said and done as recorded in the Bible.

The Lutheran Confessions call the Law and the Gospel the two chief doctrines into which all Scriptures should be divided. Walther stated something similar in Thesis I and II.

The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel. Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguishes from each other the Law and the Gospel.

It is evident from the wording of the C. F. W. Walther quote that there are other teachings and that the Gospel is not the only teaching or for that matter the controlling teaching. As Fagerberg points out,²⁷ in spite of his critics, the Lutheran Confessions discuss more than the Gospel and some issues are settled without relation to the Gospel.

²⁴ Ibid. Schultz states that anyone who "wishes to sit in judgment on the faithfulness of others to their confessional subscription ought to read the Book of Concord from a more inclusive historical perspective – something say, like 325 (The Nicene Creed) to 1580." But the "Valparaiso theology" refuses to use FC VI on the Third Use of the Law.

²⁵ Ibid. It is difficult to see how this scheme avoids introducing excessive subjectivism into theology. The word of God to me is determined by what functions as the word of God to me. It is true that not all the words in Scripture apply to each person. Examples of this principle would be both revealing and ludicrous. Still, it is the Scriptures themselves which indicate for whom the words are intended. The individual does not make the decision. The words to the Virgin Mary that she would be the Mother of the Lord to not apply to anyone but her. But no one can exclude himself from John 3:16 because Jesus is speaking about the "world."

²⁶ Op. cit.

²⁷ Holsten Fagerber, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), pp. 62ff. Dr. Schultz speaks of the "Report" and Fagerberg in the same unfortunate tones, when he states, "... the author of the Report is continuing the poverty of his master Fagerberg." Op. cit. 31. Fagerberg might have hit the jugular vein in the "Lutheran Barthian" approach. Dr. Schroeder is also negative to Fagerberg. Cf. "Law-Gospel Reductionism," p. 237.

Now in what sense are Law and Gospel the chief doctrines and how do they relate to other teachings? The Law and Gospel are not doctrines in the same sense as the doctrines, or articles of faith, in the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. (with the exception of the "for us" and "for our salvation" in the Nicene Creed). The Law and Gospel deal with how God's creative and redemptive acts, are related to God's people in preaching. A bare act of God is not Law or Gospel of itself. God's preaching or explaining his acts is Law and Gospel. The Gospel is the report of the act. Of course, Christians recognized the apostolic preaching as the divinely sanctioned explanation of divine actions against which no other explanation in the church is to be tolerated. (Sola scriptura!)

The Law, reflecting God's own essence, is the regulatory principle for all of creation and is present in the creation simply because of God's creating activity. Man's abrogation of the Law puts him under God's condemnation *ipso facto*. Natural law alerts man that he has stepped outside the boundaries and the Law given verbally by special revelation reflects this law negatively to man's sinful nature.

God acted in Israel and Jesus to fulfill His own righteous requirements in the Law. The news that God has acted both legally and *redemptively* is the Gospel. The redemptive occurrences in and of themselves are not Gospel. They become Gospel – if we dare speak like this – when God informs the world through the apostolic Word that God has acted *pro me*.

Creative activities of God are always the basis for the Law. No man can flee from God's regulating and condemning activities in the Law in nature or repeated in the word. 28 The redemptive activities of God are always the basis for the Gospel. The parting of the Sea at the Exodus was a 'redemptive' activity. It became 'Gospel' when Moses told the people that it was for them. Everything in our Lord's life, not only His crucifixion, was God's redemptive activity. Thus, the second articles of both the Apostles and Nicene Creeds describe God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ, but these events enter the realm of the Gospel when God states that he did this for me. Redemptive activities of God may be the substance of both Law and Gospel preaching. FC V states that the cross is the greatest manifestation of God's wrath, i.e., the Law. There is nothing perse illegitimate in preaching the redemptive activities in this way. Paul says that those who receive the Sacrament mockingly offend against the body and blood of the Lord. Peter reminds his hearers that they have crucified Jesus. The preaching of God's redemptive activity becomes a preaching of the Law of condemnation when the hearer refuses to believe. To summarize, the preaching of God's moral demands as known by nature or special revelation is always the foundation of the preaching of the Law. The redemptive activities serve as the substance of Gospel preaching, but can be used as the substance of a preaching of the Law.

The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation did not disagree with the Lutherans on the fact that God acted redemptively in Israel or in Jesus Christ.

Within the last few years Lutherans and Catholics reaffirmed their faith in the Nicene Creed. The Lutherans disagreed with the Catholics – and this is heart of the whole matter – on how these redemptive activities were preached. If the redemptive activities of God were preached to terrorize consciences, the hearers would not know that God had acted redemptively for them. The redemptive activities of God were preached in such a way that they were met as clubs to force the people to proper behavior. This resulted in Pharisaism, the belief that people could be saved by doing the Law, or in despair, that awareness that they could never fulfill God's demands. Here the Gospel was put before the Law as even the Calvinists do. And I suspect this is also a basic ingredient in "Lutheran Barthianism." Do the Gospel or else!

The Law and Gospel are not doctrines alongside other doctrines, e.g., incarnation, atonement, resurrection, but they are ways or categories into which God's creative and redemptive acts are placed in proclamation. To repeat, God's creative acts serve as the basis of the Law preaching alone. God's redemptive acts have their primary (but not sole) purpose in serving the Gospel message. When the Gospel message is rejected (which is not God's intention), it becomes the sharpest preaching of the Law. Where the redemptive activities are preached with the intention of controlling people's behavior or condemning them, the Gospel is perverted into Law.

It is basic to Christian theology to understand that God has acted both in redemptive deeds and in the Gospel, but differently. This distinction must be kept. The Gospel is not a redemptive historical act as our Lord's life and death are. Christ lived to fulfill the Law's requirements for human life and died to fulfill the punishment demanded by God through the Law. These are totally self-sufficient activities of God. God would have been totally just if He had accepted Christ's work and that was the end of it. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" could stand by itself. According to His mercy, He appointed first His apostles and then all Christians to declare this. This preaching is the Gospel. "The word of reconciliation," which was committed first to Paul and then to us, is the Gospel.

The Gospel is not the only doctrine as might be implied by the phrase *solum evangelium*. Bather the Gospel is first the endorsement of the Law, both natural and moral, and all of Christ's redemptive activities. The Gospel never becomes the norm to decide what may or may not be believed; the Gospel is God's message of approval on all His previous activities. The Gospel is not a principle of reduction but a principle of inclusion. There is no occurrence in the life of our Lord which He did not do for me. He was born of the virgin for me. He walked on the water for me. He instituted the sacrament for me. (what a beautiful job Luther did in explaining the benefit of the Sacrament in the Small Catechism in his exposition of "given and shed for you for the remission of sin!") He rose from the dead for me! Behind every redemptive deed that God did in Christ is a "FOR ME."

Christians can never *do Gospel*, even when "we forgive those who trespass against us." The Gospel is the news *that* God has done something *for me*. The *that* always comes first, the *for* always comes second. It is no longer the Gospel when I hear only that "God

is for me" or that "God forgives me my sins." The *propter Christum*, on account of Christ, is basic to the Gospel proclamation, Augustana IV. Included in the *propter Christum*, is everything which the four Gospels states that He did. It is summarized in the Apostles and Nicene Creed. Lutherans and Catholics did not disagree in the *that* as evidence that at Augsburg the Catholics accepted Augustana I and III. As Jaroslav Pelikan aptly states the Lutherans from the beginning were *Obedient Rebels.*²⁹

The Missouri Synod today is engaged in a controversy over the *that*. Dr. Schroeder claims that Walther came clown on the side of the for and that Pieper straddled both *for* and *that*, but leaned to the latter.³⁰ Dr. Bretscher calls the that, "the log in the eye," which has to be removed before the Missouri Synod can do theology again. If the *that*, i.e., all events and occurrences in Christ's life, and for matter Israel's life beginning with the call of Abraham, are removed, then we will not have any theology at all. The *for* in theology rests on the fact that God did something. If "Lutheran Barthianism" gains the field, the *for us* will also be lost. The history of Barthianism validates the type of theological domino theory. "And the rains came … and great was the fall of that house."³¹

APPENDIX

A good example of Gospel used as a doctrinal norm or standard (principium cognoscendi) is given by Dr. Robert W. Jenson in his article "Lutheran Conditions for Communion in Holy Things" which appeared in the same issue of the CTM with Dr. Bretscher's "The Log in Your Own Eye." On the basis of his understanding of the word "Gospel" in Augustana VII, Dr. Jenson of Gettysburg argues that there is sufficient basis for fellowship between Lutherans and Episcopalians. Jenson's major argument is that where there is agreement on the "Gospel" there can be nevertheless different theologies. All this becomes of some interest, since Augustana VII was widely used in the Missouri Synod to establish fellowship with The American Lutheran Church in 1969. The argument for church fellowship based on Augustana VII is that where there is a ministry of word and sacrament, church fellowship is possible. Other doctrinal

²⁹ Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant principle in Luther's Reformation (New York: Harper, 1964). The subtitle to Dr. Schultz's essay "Reflection on the Current Controversy in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod" is curiously revealing "An Attempt to Express Pastoral Concern." The term "pastoral concern" appeared in news release from a June 28, 1972 meeting of Lutheran theologians. As Dr. Schultz quotes, the release also said that the controversy is to he commended to the Gospel. The use of "Gospel" and "Pastoral Concern" indicates the very area of conflict. One group, of which Dr. Schultz is representative, wants to settle the difficulties by speaking the Gospel to one another. This Gospel area in Dr. Schultz's theology seems to be suspended above the Scriptures and basically immune from historical investigation. This type of thinking leads us to use the phrase "Lutheran Barthianism." Dr. Preus and his group desire to settle the issue on the basis of what the Scriptures clearly say. The case of the women pastors does not have be repeated as a good case in point. For Dr. Schultz, controversies, including doctrinal ones, loose their stamina when they are confronted with Gospel, forgiveness, and pastoral concern. He is quite consistent.

³⁰ Ibid

^{31 &}quot;Law-Gospel Reductionism," op. cit. It seems also to be the purpose of Richard E. Loenig in the first article of a three-part installment to show that Pieper is responsible for what Koenig calls "Missouri Synods' rigidity and unfeeling application of its orthodox principles." "Church and Tradition in Collision," Lutheran Forum, 6, 4 (November 1972) pp. 17-20.

concerns are secondary and do not effect the basic fellowship of the Gospel. With such wide definition, some thought that the Missouri Synod could declare fellowship not only with the ALC but with any organization that engaged in Gospel proclamation and sacramental distribution. Dr. Jenson proves that such fears were not unfounded at all. The use of Augustana VII in ecumenical discussion is only of recent vintage. Dr. Nelson suggests the 1950's (op. cit., p. 166).

My Lutheran World Federation Today (CPH, 1971, pp. 23-26) showed that Augustana VII is improperly used in matters of establishing church fellowship. This article speaks of the una sancta which is present wherever the good news of Jesus is preached and the sacraments administered. The entire Book of Concord, including the Augustana, speaks mightily against the theory that fellowship can be established on the basis of the "Gospel." If Jenson's understanding of Augustana VII is correct, then Luther and all the reformers flagrantly broke their own principle or were ignorant of it! The Lutherans never denied that the church was present among the Roman Catholics as the Gospel was preached and the sacraments were being administered; still fellowship was denied Rome, Geneva, and later even the Church of England, something which Jenson wants to allow now on the basis of the same document(s). If the writers of the Lutheran Confessions refused fellowship on their understanding of their own writings, it seems inappropriate that a 20th century understanding should supersede the understanding of the original writers.



THESES ON THE LAW AND GOSPEL

(January 1973)

Theses on the Law and Gospel

JANUARY 1973

- 1. Is the Gospel primary for theology? Primary can have two meanings. The Gospel is primary in the sense that it is the chief content of preaching and the final goal. The Gospel is not primary in the sense that it is the first step in theology.
- 2. What is then the first step in theology? The Gospel can only be preached after a number of prior assumptions have been made. The number of prior assumptions can vary depending on how they are divided or counted.
- 3. Does this mean that the Gospel is really dependent on *something* or *someone else?* No! The Gospel never hits a person in a moral or ethical vacuum, but only has saving efficacy where a person has at least a sense of guilt, but it is not dependent for its content.
- 4. Is a sense of personal guilt the only prior assumption? No, there are others. Before a person can receive the Gospel, he must have an awareness in some sense or another of a God who holds him morally responsible.
- 5. Does this mean that there must be mere intellectual or rational awareness of God before the Gospel is preached? No, there must be more than a mere intellectual knowledge. A philosophical concept of God as the Prime Cause, *prima causa*, of all things is not sufficient. What is required is knowledge of a moral God making moral demands on man. Still there are no theology and Gospel without some type of knowledge about God and His existence.
- 6. Is an intellectual acceptance of the idea of a God or Divine Being the only step necessary before receiving the Gospel? While such a knowledge is necessary, it is not the only factor necessary for hearing the Gospel. Without feeling moral or ethical guilt, the Gospel is totally without its saving or redeeming effects.¹
- 7. How do people receive this sense of moral guilt? All people are born with a sense of morality or ethics, a sense of right or wrong. Man, unlike all other creatures, is moral.
 - 8. Does this mean that man is infallible or near infallible in using this moral

Note to Theses 3, 4, 5, 6: It might appear in the case of infant baptism that the Gospel, without the Law, is applied directly to the child. If this were so, then there would be an instance in which Gospel, that is, the Gospel in Baptism, comes before the Law. The ancient liturgies of Baptism which are preserved as the regular forms in the Lutheran Church all indicate that the child is morally accountable both in guilt and consequences. Baptismal formulas for children follow this order. The Gospel of Jesus' blessing the children is first read to indicate that children are indeed to be included in the kingdom and thus are entitled to Baptism. Then the child is asked if he renounces Satan and his works and accepts the Apostolic Creed. After, follows Baptism. Baptism is a pure proclamation of grace, but it is only administered on the presupposition that the child like all other human beings is a sinner and accountable to God. Strange as it might seem both Roman and Baptist traditions in Christendom hold the child morally accountable only when it gets to what is called the age of reason when the child does something wrong. More should be said on the matter. Let it suffice here that the Lutheran Confessions look upon sin first as an inborn state or condition and secondly as what people actually do. Thus, even in the case of infant baptism, Law precedes Gospel.

function to distinguish right from wrong? Man cannot always infallibly distinguish right from wrong, but he is so created by God that he must use this function of distinguishing right from wrong. Because of sin, the moral function in fact often misfunctions.

- 9. Does this mean that man is always a moral being? Yes, man is always a moral being, capable of and destined to make moral decisions. With this moral sense he has a sense of moral responsibility.
- 10. Does a man ever lose these moral senses? He can if he constantly ignores or breaks the inborn moral sense. Society recognizes that such individuals must be confined for their own sakes and for the sake of society.
- 11. Can man receive a moral knowledge from outside of himself? Yes, this moral sense, involving the ability to decide between right or wrong and the responsibility for one's actions, were given through special revelations by God to Noah, Abraham, and the Patriarchs. Moses, however, is considered the chief giver of the moral law since he is first responsible for writing down the prior moral mandates and is the one who received the Ten Commandments. Today these moral directives with ensuing moral accountability are recorded in the Bible.
- 12. Are the inborn moral sense and the Ten Commandments different? The moral sense and the Ten Commandments are not different in content. In both God has adequately given the Law. However, the moral sense inborn in man takes priority over the Ten Commandments for several reasons:
 - A. The moral sense is an essential and basic part of the creation which is God's first act of love to the world.
 - B. This moral sense is universally available to mankind, even among those societies which did not receive the special revelations made to the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Prophets.
 - C. This moral sense can be seen wherever men are governing themselves. No society can or does exist without government. Rulers and leaders are God's agents for this moral law. The moral inborn sense is universal.
 - D. The Ten Commandments are a summary of and are based on this moral code. Thus, the Second Table of the Ten Commandments can and may be and is applied to and in all society.

In another sense the Ten Commandments have priority over the moral sense as Law.

- A. The Ten Commandments are God's own articulations, i.e., in words, of the moral sense.
- B. Man's own articulation of the moral sense is always imperfect and faulty because of sin. The Ten Commandments and their further elaboration in Scripture are God's, and not man's, articulations of His own law.
- C. The moral sense was directed to man in a state of sinlessness, but the Ten Commandments are directed particularly to man in a condition of sin and thus more useful.

Is the Law in either form chiefly positive or negative? God's Law in creation was basically positive, giving directives to man what he should do. Man, by stepping outside of this relationship with God, caused the law to function negatively. This was not God's original purpose.

- 13. In preparation for the Gospel message must the written Mosaic Law be used or acknowledged as valid? No, the preacher of the Gospel message may convict his hearers by calling attention to the abrogation of the moral sense available within man and nature in general. This will in no way be contrary to the Mosaic Law.
- 14. Is the acceptance of God with His moral demands the only prior requirement to Gospel preaching? No, the hearer must have some type of conviction concerning his own or the world's existence. He cannot doubt the world's or his own real or actual or objective existence. Each man himself and the world which he knows is the source to him of the moral sense. Without an implicit awareness to such objective existence, the moral demands of God in nature have no avenues to make demands on man. Even those who deny this type of existence still however can and do live morally.
- 15. Is not the opinion requiring acknowledgment of objective reality rationalistic? Rationalism in its classical form means that that which is not understandable has no existence. It means that there are not two sources of knowledge, natural and supernatural, but one, natural. The Law can and does have natural and supernatural sources. This opinion is not an idea compatible with Rationalism, classical or otherwise. The idea of natural law is Pauline, Catholic, and Lutheran.
- 16. Is it possible for the Gospel to exist without the Law? It is possible that men can have a knowledge of the Law and have no knowledge of the Gospel; however, the Gospel can never function to save persons without the Law and without the Law's functioning to condemn persons. The Gospel as purely historical knowledge can create fides historica, essential to saving faith but not identical to it.
- 17. Is the Gospel then dependent on the Law? No. However, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed for salvation, the Law must first be known.
- 18. In what way(s) is the Law proclaimed in connection with the Gospel? The Gospel has meaning only to those convicted by the Law. The Gospel is essentially the news that in Christ Jesus God has fulfilled all of the righteous demands of His own Law and has suffered the punishments which were the necessary consequences of man's breaking the Law. The Law is the blueprint for the sacrifice of Christ. The Law is to Christ what a map is to the traveler. Therefore, we can say that God acted legally or lawfully. He was compelled not by the Law or His nature but moved by His own love to redeem man; but after He committed Himself to the redemption of man, He acted according to His Law not without or contrary to it.
- 19. When it is said that the Law lays down the requirements for the Gospel, is not the Gospel becoming subservient to the Law or written code? An opinion of this type could only be entertained if the moral Law of God were the result of an arbitrary act of God or if the Law of God were an accident of history or culture to meet man's needs at a certain time. But on the contrary, the Law of God is a reflection of His essence. The

Law is a picture of true reality. It is an essential part of all creation, including the very essence of God. It is not added *post factum*, and it is never removed. The Law can never be said to be an inadequate or faulty revelation of God since all revelations of God are without imperfection.

- 20. Doesn't the Gospel replace the Law? Insofar as the Law makes demands and sets the boundaries for a proper relationship with God the Law is never replaced. Insofar as the Law threatens all breakers of the Law, the Law is replaced by the Gospel. The Gospel is not the news that the Law does not hold persons accountable, but rather it is the news that God holds Jesus Christ accountable for our transgressions.
- 21. Will the Law be abolished in eternity or the *parousia*? As long as there is creation, there will be Law. Divine creation always has the Law built into it. The second table of the Law with its regulations for society will pass away when the earthly society is superseded by the heavenly one. However, in glory, redeemed man kind will obey the first table of the Law perfectly at all times. Only one God will be acknowledged, and His name honored and worshipped. Thus, the first three commandments can be summarized as loving God.

Even the second table will be fulfilled perfectly because the redeemed will love each other perfectly.

The threats of the Law will be totally invalid in heaven because in Christ the redeemed have kept the Law perfectly. Upon the unjust the Law works its wrath forever. Today the Law even threatens the "old Adam" in Christians, that obstinate part which refuses to be converted. Works done by threats do not pertain to or assist salvation.

- 22. The Law can and does exist outside of special or supernatural revelation. Can the same be said about the Gospel? No! The Gospel exists only through a special act of God's love. This is called grace. It is not found in and through creation and it may not be identified with God's creative love or with His acts of forbearance or leniency in not visiting the sinner immediately with the consequences of his sin.
- 23. Where can the Gospel be found? The Gospel always is at least a type of intellectual information which God has provided since the fall into sin. It is simply God's promise that He will provide the solution to man's predicament in sin. Before the New Testament times it is the news that a descendant of Eve will arise from fallen mankind to restore man at least to his original condition. Christians know Jesus as the answer to these promises.
- 24. Can the Gospel be verified? God's ultimate verification of His promise is Jesus who is the promised man.
- 25. Did God provide any verification of this Gospel before Jesus? In the age that God gave the promise of future deliverance, He provided signs to His people. God's command to believe the promise of the Gospel before Jesus was accompanied by signs which supported their truth in the promise and their hope in the future Deliverer.
- 26. What were some of these signs before Jesus? Seth, Noah, the Patriarchs, Moses, the Judges, the Davidic Kings, and the Prophets possessed, and were themselves

tangible, historical, and available signs pointing to the final or ultimate deliverance. In some cases, saints eager for God's deliverer, made false identifications. Cain was not Eve's deliverer, even though she had hoped for this. Seth was a sign of the promise to her. Saints died knowing that salvation was still in the future.

27. Is the Gospel prior to the Scriptures? Obviously, the Gospel or the Promise existed many years before it was inscripturated. God is known as a speaking God rather than a writing God. Even then the spoken Promise never existed without the spoken Law. True, the Gospel came into existence before the Bible did. This situation, however, does not exist for us. The situation in the church since the death of the apostles is that the Gospel comes through the Scriptures and is normed in the Scriptures as to its content. Thus, today the Scriptures are prior to the Gospel.

28. Can the Gospel exist without the Scriptures today? The Gospel exists in other forms outside of the Scripture. Only the Gospel as it exists in the Scriptures however bears the guarantee of God's own divine certification. Thus, the Gospel, regardless of the form, must be judged and checked by its divine norm, the Holy Scriptures. Even Bible translations, which are bearers of the Gospel, only do so insofar as they adequately convey the original thoughts. All forms of the Gospel, including translations, must be checked against the Scripture in the original languages. In summary, the Gospel does exist apart from the Scripture but it must be constantly corrected, judged, augmented by Scripture.

29. Since the Gospel today is dependent on the Scriptures, do the Scriptures save us? Only Jesus saves a person because of His atoning death. He alone is the object of faith. The Gospel which is the news that this has happened may be said to save a person because the Gospel is the message which directs to Jesus. The Holy Scriptures as a conveyor of the Gospel and God's divinely certified source of the Gospel can also in this sense be said as having saving qualities. Since not every word of God is Gospel but some words are Law, the Holy Scriptures as word also preach the Law and in doing only this, the Holy Scriptures do not save. Paul specifically says that the Holy Scriptures were given to make us wise unto salvation by the Gospel.

30. What is the relationship of the Gospel and our interpretation of the Bible?

A. Is any method of Biblical interpretation possible? Not every proposed method of Biblical interpretation is possible. A great variety of methods of Biblical and Gospel *proclamation* are not only possible, but are now being legitimately used. However, the science of Biblical interpretation is, comparatively, limited severely. To put it quite simply, the method of literary interpretation can be no more than what is suggested by the literature itself. Each pericope supplies its own principle of interpretation. Where pericopes are determined to be of the same type, then the predetermined principles of one pericope can be transferred to another. However, even in these cases, the principles of interpretation can hypothetically be demonstrated from the pericope itself and must be demonstrated upon demand.

For example, Paul's use of allegory or analogy in Galatians 4 in regard to

Jerusalem does not mean that any other pericope can be considered allegory or analogy. Simply because The Good Samaritan pericope is a parable does not suggest that other pericopes, The Creation or The Nativity of Jesus, are also parables. The possible ahistorical character of a parable has nothing to say whatsoever with the historical character of those events which claim to be history.

The Scriptures, like any other literature, demand no more than what other literature demands. There is no limitless range of methods of Biblical interpretation for one pericope.

B. Is the Gospel a limiting principle of Biblical interpretation? The Gospel is not a limiting principle of Biblical interpretation. In fact, the Gospel is not a principle of Biblical interpretation, but a result of a method of Biblical interpretation derived from certain but not all pericopes.

A prior, extra-biblical Gospel principle of Biblical interpretation is by very definition not a legitimate principle of Biblical interpretation, because it is not taken from the literature or dependent on the literature which it purports to interpret. Even where the Gospel is admittedly derived from the Holy Scripture, the Gospel is never a principle of Biblical interpretation. Those sections of the Bible identified as having Gospel are handled by raw literary principles. The Gospel is not a principle of interpretation to be applied even to Gospel sections. Gospel is the product of various pericopes when those pericopes are interpreted in the light of the original intentions of the writer. Thus parables (Prodigal Son) and historical accounts (Cross and Resurrection) and the application of theology (Philippians 2) can all be Gospel, the news of the good things that God has done for us. This in no way suggests or allows for a transferal of Biblical principles from one pericope to another.

There are many sections of the Bible which were not written to convey the Gospel and which today do not have this as a purpose. It is also questionable whether they directly and immediately serve the Gospel. The Book of Proverbs is a case in point. Certainly, the creation account might provide background material for the Gospel but it is not and can never be the Gospel. Creation is love, not Gospel!

To apply the category of Gospel to a pericope which did not at the time of its writing intend to offer Gospel is to offend against the pericope itself and to do a disservice to all principles of literary criticism.

31. Is the Gospel the only valid product of Biblical interpretation? To be sure the Gospel, i.e., the news that God has fulfilled His own law in Jesus Christ, is the final word of God today, but it is not the only word of God. Scripture as word of God offers us other news besides what is commonly called Gospel. It tells us about creation, the history of Israel, Jesus Christ, and the early church. It is debatable just how much of this salvation history (not including creation) is Law or Gospel or both. Still the validity of any of these pericopes as word of God in no way depends on one's ability to

determine whether they are Law or Gospel. God's word, including Scripture, is God's word prior to any interpretation of that word. God's last word will be one of judgment or sentencing.

32. Is the Gospel the judge of the Scriptures or is the reverse so? This question can be reworded to help us understand the problem better: Is the Gospel the judge of the word of God or is the word of God the judge of the Gospel? Since God tells us that He and His own Law has saved us (this is the Gospel) the word of God is first and can never be judged by the Gospel. Since the word of God informs us what the Gospel is, the word of God is prior and always remains prior to the Gospel. Scriptures as authoritative word of God are therefore the norm or standard of the Gospel.

The conditions for salvation are determined by God. Before (this is a logical and not a temporal priority) God set forth the Gospel's plan of salvation, God was not totally without options. In other words, God redeemed the world not of necessity but out of love. It must be granted that God could have not intervened and could have allowed the world to remain in its condition of fallenness, and this in all justice. He was also free within the boundaries of His own essence to carry out any other plan at any other place. The salvation of the world is a demonstration of His freedom and sovereignty. However, to the plan of salvation recorded in the Bible, He has freely committed Himself. The revelation of this plan and its being carried out are the Gospel.

It would be a misuse of the Gospel and affront to God's mercy to make the Gospel a judge of the Scripture or any other word of God. The Gospel should not be used by man to tell us what God may, can or must tell us or say or do. The Gospel is to be accepted as what God has indeed said. To make the Gospel the judge of the Holy Scriptures or any word which God speaks to us is to destroy the function of the Gospel, which informs us what God has done.

33. Is our knowledge of the Gospel dependent on a correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures? Absolutely, yes! The knowledge of the Gospel can only come through a preaching of the message which is set down by the Scriptures themselves. This does not mean or demand a correct interpretation in each case or pericope. Some with a saving knowledge of the Gospel have had a faulty concept of the nature of the Scriptures, word of God, Scriptures as word of God, many facets of the Biblical content including the Gospel at certain points, and still have had the Gospel. This saving knowledge of the Gospel still comes from the Bible in spite of (not because of) the faulty hermeneutical procedures and through the use of valid hermeneutical procedures (though not recognized), even where such procedures are ignored or explicitly denied.

34. Is it possible, even hypothetically, that if it could be demonstrated that the Scriptures deny the Gospel, that we still would or could hold to the Gospel? This is not possible! If we accept Scriptures as the only norm or source of all teaching in the church and/or as the word of God, and if we conclude that they in all their parts have no Gospel, then we must conclude that there is no Gospel. For what a person should do to please God or to be saved, he is dependent upon God's revealed requirements. God then informs him of the Gospel. In this scheme the Gospel is dependent upon God.

God is not dependent on the Gospel!

35. Can the church guarantee the Gospel? No, only God is the guarantor of the Gospel. The church is God's creation through the Gospel not the creator or guarantor of the Gospel. It is not the function of the church at any time to sit in judgment upon what God may or may not say or what He has indeed said. Neither does the church supply the interpretation to what God has said. God does not speak unclear words. The church's function is to believe these words and to preach these words to those who still do not believe. The church has no function, authority, or power to tell us what the Gospel is. It also has no power to create or perpetuate the Gospel where God has not provided it.

36. Do we because we are Lutherans recognize the Gospel as the final and foremost word of God? Lutherans are frequently distinguished from other denominations because our stated purpose is to preach the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. The founding fathers of the Lutheran Church and its early major teachers agree in this. The Lutheran Confessions give testimony to this. Still we as Lutherans do not adhere to this devotion to the Gospel because we are Lutherans, but rather because we have committed ourselves to the Holy Scriptures as the word of God. In fact it is downright "unLutheran" to state that we hold to any tenet of Lutheran theology, including the Gospel, simply because it is Lutheran. The Lutheran Church and its Confessions are no more guarantors of the word of God and the Gospel than the Roman Church is the guarantor of the divine truth. The church receives the word of God with a grateful heart, believes the Gospel and through its life and testimony calls others to repentance.

37. If the Holy Scriptures are restricted in regard to permissible interpretation by the intent of the writers, and if the Holy Scriptures collectively and in the individual books provide the Gospel in all clarity, how is it that not all who use the Holy Scriptures find the Gospel?

There is no prior guarantee that everyone who hears the word of God will properly receive it. The parable of the Sower and the Seed teaches us to expect unbelief as man's natural response to God's word. Some reject God, others reject His word, and others simply do not understand or falsify His word. There are some who recognize the Scriptures as the word of God and do not have the Gospel. Others do not explicitly recognize the Scriptures as the word of God and still have the Gospel. Still others recognize neither the Scriptures as word of God nor the Gospel.

The reason for rejection of any word of God, including the Gospel, is sheer unbelief. Even where a clear understanding of the Gospel does exist, this does not assure that the Gospel will be accepted for its saving purposes. Satan is the factor in any interpretation, faulty, imperfect, incomplete, or unclear. He twists clear words of God to His own purpose [Gen. 3:1ff.]. He is ultimately and personally responsible for the concept that the Holy Scripture may not necessarily teach the Gospel and still urges us to believe the Gospel. Soon after, this "suspended-in-a-vapor Gospel" also disappears. Until Jesus appears as the universal judge, interpretations conflicting with the original intent will multiply. Those who do this do it without impunity but must suffer the just

consequences, "But woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"

38. Is the Gospel a unifying principle in interpreting the Bible? The Gospel is the one goal for which God gave us the Holy Scriptures. When the Christian comes to the conviction that God has proclaimed to him the Gospel in one section of the Scripture, he expects to hear or read the same good news in other sections of the Scriptures even before hearing or reading them. In some cases he will hear the accusing Law or Gospel, or Law applied to Christian living. Sometimes he will find all of these in one section.

There will be some sections hard to understand not because God speaks unclearly but because of the intervening years and the changes in cultures. These sections will be judged in light of the clearer ones. The difficult sections do not detract from those sections where the meaning is more apparent. In this way we may speak of the Gospel as a unifying principle.

Since each passage of each book, each book of both Testaments, serve to declare Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer, the Gospel as goal of the Bible unifies the Bible.

God as the author of the Bible is the unifying principle so far as the source is concerned. Christ and salvation is the unifying principle so far as the goal is concerned.

- 39. Does the Gospel as message save us? The Gospel as message does not save us. The Gospel as the news that God has redeemed us from sin does save us. Words as words, even religious words are without ultimate saving value even though these words might have an emotional or psychological benefit when they are spoken.
- 40. What act is then really the redemptive act? Gospel preaching is not a redemptive act. The only redemptive act is the sacrificial death of Jesus through which He satisfied all God's requirements. Resurrection is not a redemptive act in this sense, rather it is God's own certification of approval on the death of Jesus and what it accomplished.
- 41. What is the relation between the redemptive act of God, Jesus' atoning death by crucifixion, and the Gospel? The Gospel comes out from the cross and receives its significance and meaning from the cross. Without the cross there is no Gospel and indeed could be no Gospel I Jesus' atoning death could have existed without the Gospel, that is, without being included in a message for the benefit of man. In other words, the Gospel is dependent on the Cross; the Cross is not dependent on the Gospel-proclamation of the cross. God did, however, freely and lovingly choose to declare His own atonement in the Cross! God was not compelled by His nature or the revelation of His nature in the Law to declare in the Gospel His act of atonement in Jesus.
- 42. What is the relationship of the atoning death of Jesus to the word of God? This question must be answered in two parts:
 - A. The word of God, as Law, which was God's prior purpose, outlines the requirements by which a man can be justified before God. It also carries with it its own penalties. Thus, the word of God sets the requirements for the life and the death of Jesus, if He is going to redeem mankind.
 - B. Following (at least logically so) the completion of Jesus' redemptive activities, God reports what He has done for the world out of love. The word

of God as God's own guarantee stands between the event of the cross and its proclamation.

To summarize, the word of God sets down the requirements for a death of atonement and then proclaims that God has indeed fulfilled these requirements. In all of theology, Law, Gospel or whatever, the Word of God - and not Gospel - is the controlling principle.

43. Can we still say that the Gospel is the controlling principle in theology and its goal? The controlling principle in theology is always God (and His Word) and the goal is always Jesus as the Law-fulfiller. Gospel, as message, is functional in this task and only the Gospel can direct faith to Jesus.

It is a worship of words (logolatry) to hang on to the proclamation as proclamation (kerygmalotry). This is important to state since the most prominent and influential school of theological thought holds to this very thing of believing the message for the message's sake. We hold to the message not for its own sake but because of what the message reports and contains, the death of Jesus for sins.

- 44. Is it the church's obligation to apply the Gospel to society, the structures of society, or the world in general? As this question is worded, the answer must be an emphatic no. The church does not apply just Gospel. It preaches the Law to all but preaches the Gospel only to the penitent, that is, those who have felt the sting of Law in their hearts. The Gospel also has no effect on organizations as organizations. It can have its effects on individuals who believe in Jesus and who participate in society. But the Gospel is not intended for society, governments, or civic groups in general. If we assign to the Gospel the task of affecting society, then we have turned the Gospel into Law. The common bond between church and society is recognition of a moral law and not a revealed law and Gospel.
- 45. Do Christians live by the Gospel instead of living by the Law? Christians have been saved by believing the Gospel and no longer do they live by the fear and threats of the Law. Jesus through His perfect performance of the Law's demands and His allatoning death under the Law's penalties has freed man from earning his own salvation according to the Law. Christians do live their lives under the Gospel freed from the Law's threat of punishment.
- 46. Does this mean that the Christian is totally free from the Law? Salvation is given freely apart from the Law. This is the message of St. Paul which was revived in the Reformation by Luther. In this new state under the Gospel, the believer, freed by Jesus from the demand of the Law to earn His salvation, sees the Law in a new light and lives according to the Law also.
- 47. Doesn't the Law always demand and threaten and thus is it not opposed to the Gospel? To the sinner the Law demands and threatens, but to the child of God the Law becomes what God had originally intended it to be, the perfect expression of how God wants His children to live. This is called the Third Use of the Law in the Lutheran Confessions. Luther saw this and put it so beautifully in his explanation of the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism. God does not place prohibitions before the

believer, but gives him positive commands. Jesus explained this as love and told the parable of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of how Christians are to love. Still, we are saved not because we love or do the Law in a positive way, but because Jesus died for us, as the Gospel declares.



"THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION"

(July 1974)

"The Church's One Foundation" 1

JULY 1974

The Evangelical Lutherans in Mission have adopted as their position paper a document called *The Church's One Foundation*, a name taken from a hymn written by the Anglican bishop Samuel J. Stone in the nineteenth century.² It was clear from those proposing and adopting the statement that it was not to be forced on the consciences of others, but that it was to help put the focus on current problems. In one way or another it will enter the confessional history of our time, as it reflects the theological thinking of a large portion of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. On that account, an analytical response is not inappropriate at this time. Two basic issues stand out among those which are discussed in *The Church's One Foundation*. The two issues are those relating to authority in the church and the church itself.

A. AUTHORITY

The framers of the document are aware that a charge of "Gospel reductionism" has been brought against them, and in a certain sense they consider this description valid. The older, more generally accepted, traditional position of Lutheranism sees the Bible as the only source of authority, sola scriptura. The Church's One Foundation wants to move away from this position. This is not to say that the Bible plays no role in the authority question, but it becomes ancillary to Christ or the "Gospel" for purposes of authority. The basis of authority in the church is the "Gospel" itself. The "Gospel" itself convinces the writers that the "Gospel" itself is the basis of authority in the church. The "Gospel" is "the source and goal of all true doctrine." The document has a particular meaning of the word "Gospel" which we shall not fail to discuss, but it is incumbent upon us to discuss first the "Gospel" as the principle of authority in *The Church's One Foundation*.

In making the "Gospel" the principle of authority, the document eliminates other possibilities. First of all, the Bible is not to be considered the one or basic principle of authority. This is handled in several ways in the document. The clearest expression of this principle occurs when the document says that the question "How do I know the Gospel is true?" may not be answered with "Because the Bible says so." Also, mentioned as unacceptable bases for the "Gospel's" authority are "rational proof, ecclesiastical

¹ The numbers in the notes correspond to paragraphs in The Church's One Foundation as it was printed in Missouri in Perspective, unless otherwise indicated

² The Church's One Foundation was printed in Missouri in Perspective, I, 22 (August 26, 1974), pp. 1f. It seems to have been adopted as the Here We Stand, document of Evangelical Lutheran in Mission on August 27, 1974, according to Missouri in Perspective, I, 23 (September 9, 1974), p. 3. I am assuming that The Church's One Foundation was adopted as the Here We Stand document without alteration. Any explanation of change of the name of the document has escaped me, as have any emendations made by the adopting assembly.

³ Missouri in Perspective, 19.

authority, religious experience, or a doctrine about the Bible." 4 Since Lutheranism has traditionally spoken of the Bible as the basis of authority, the document singles out this view from among the unacceptable options for special attention. The document merges the concept of the Bible as authority with the concept of "a doctrine about the Bible" in such a way that for the writers these two different concepts become actually only one concept. This confusion, deliberate or accidental, is scarcely helpful. Some time ago I discussed these issues in "The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod" and "These on the Law and the Gospel,"5 and I should like to refer the reader back to these essays for a more extensive clarification of these issues. At this time, I should like to repeat that, before an individual accepts salvation in Jesus Christ as his ransom from sin, he has to make a number of prior assumptions. He has to believe that there is a God, that the word condemning him as a sinner is God's word (Law), and, at least implicitly, that the word bringing the news of his salvation is God's word. This word can be the Bible itself, a message contained in the Bible, or a message which is in some way derived from the Bible. Enough said on this matter here, as I should only be repeating myself. The Church's One Foundation, however, seems to reject the understanding just outlined when it asserts that "it is false to say that faith in Jesus the Christ depends upon a prior and 'implicit' faith in everything contained in the Bible." (Would the authors of the document accept the rejected statement as true if "everything" were changed to "something"?) Scored as unacceptable are "a prior faith in the Bible" and "an implicit 'faith' in the Bible as the inerrant word of God." The last option is said to verge on "idolatry." The Church's One Foundation does, to be sure, have positive words to say about "reason, the Bible, feelings, and the Church's witness." They inform and enrich the understanding of faith, but they are not faith's foundation.

In several places and in different ways, the point is made clear that the "Gospel" is the basic principle of authority. Two questions must be put forth: How is this "Gospel" defined? How does the Gospel's authority convince me? Since adherence to the principle of "Gospel reductionism" is acknowledged and since the document explicitly gives the "Gospel" the position of the standard or final norm, these are really the important questions. Two synonyms seem to be used in the document for the term "Gospel" "the word of God for the world" and "the Gospel of the Kingdom." There might be a slight shade of difference in the use of these phrases, but such a distinction cannot be determined on the basis of this document alone. They will be handled as once concept under the designation of "Gospel." "Gospel" involves "word and action, preaching and service, judgment and healing." For its target is not only the church,

⁴ Missouri in Perspective, 14.

⁵ The Springfielder, XXXVI, 3 (December 1972), pp. 156-171; XXXVII, 1 (June 1973), pp. 53-63.

⁶ Missouri in Perspective, 14.

⁷ Missouri in Perspective, 16.

⁸ Missouri in Perspective, 4.

⁹ Missouri in Perspective, 4.

but it "encompasses the whole of life, social and individual, religious and secular." The comment might be in order here that this assertion seems to reflect "the theology of hope" which effectually abolishes the line between what Luther called the kingdoms of the left and right hands, the secular and the spiritual realms. "The Church witnesses to the presence and coming of the Kingdom." This statement also seems to be a description of the "Gospel." The chief sign of this "Kingdom's coming" is the "Lord's cross and resurrection victory over sin and death." 12

One is at a loss to understand "Gospel" which is basic to the document, is defined in such minimal terms, unless of course the "Gospel" is minimal in content. To be sure, the authority of the "Gospel" and the function of the "Gospel" receive more attention. But what the Gospel is, in itself, is most inadequately presented. These few conclusions can be drawn from what the document present: (1) The "Gospel" involves oral proclamation. (2) The "Gospel" involves service in the sense of rendering some type of physical aid, i.e., "healing." (3) The "Gospel" signals the coming of the Kingdom, but the concept of "Kingdom" is barely defined. (4) The signs of this coming Kingdom are the cross and resurrection victory, but there seems to be latitude for other signs. (More must be said about the "signs" concept later.) In short, the "Gospel" seems to be the church's proclamation in word and deed of its own continuing life. Jesus is a is a part of this life. I welcome any assistance in arriving at a more precise definition of "Gospel" as used in *The Church's One Foundation*. What is startling is what is not included. The Gospel has been traditionally defined as the news that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has offered a full and perfect atonement for all sins, or something of the same character. No such concept appears in *The Church's One Foundation*.

The second question which must be asked, as I have noted, is how does the "Gospel's" authority convince me. The Bible, reason, feelings, and ecclesiastical authority have already been mentioned as answers which are found unacceptable. The answer which the document gives to this question is very simple: faith. "Faith is the gift bestowed by the working of the Holy Spirit thorough the Gospel proclaimed and celebrated in the means of Grace. Any answer beyond this or other than this betrays the chief treasure of Lutheranism." (Emphases are in the original document.)¹³ This same principle is also stated in a negative way: "To 'prove' the Gospel by something other than the Gospel is to deny the Gospel."¹⁴ Much could be said about this concept. (1) It seems to be a variation on the position that the Bible is true because it claims to be true. Now it is applied to the "Gospel" principle. (2) It moves the sola fide into the position previously occupied by the sola scriptura in Lutheran theology. In Lutheran theology, faith alone was the posture of the believer who trusted in God alone for salvation because of the merits of Jesus Christ. Sola fide was not the principle whereby the believer determined

¹⁰ Missouri in Perspective, 4.

¹¹ Missouri in Perspective, 5.

¹² Missouri in Perspective, 5.

¹³ Missouri in Perspective, 15.

¹⁴ Missouri in Perspective, 16.

what was true either for himself or anyone else. (3) The question of authority is merged and submerged into the question of soteriology. The basis of theology dissolves into the goal. The idea seems to be: "I know that the Gospel is true because I am saved." Salvation precedes truth. (But if salvation precedes truth, is damnation even a possibility?) (4) The concept that the "Gospel" is true simply because it is true, presents a number of problems. (a) This is an assertion without any type of verification. It could be used of any axiom. (b) If the "Gospel" is the source of its own truth, then what about the Law? If the "Gospel" is the source of all religious truth, then the Law is not true. Or the Law is true only after one comes to an awareness of the truth of the "Gospel." Or is the Law simply subsumed into "Gospel"? (d) This kind of "Gospel" suspended in midair reflects a Barthianism which sees the "Word" as non-historical and incapable of human verification. It is just plain fideism: "I simply believe because I believe" (e) It is reasoning in a circle, a criticism that can be leveled against many theologies and philosophies.

B. THE CHURCH

The other major topic discussed at some length is the doctrine of the church and the related issue of fellowship. As I previously mentioned, the church's life is included as part of the Gospel proclamation. Church unity is "a sign of the future offered in promise to the whole of mankind." Since visible unity is a means of "evangelizing," this unity must be made manifest. Divisions in the church, presumably denominational ones, must be obliterated so that the church can carry out this function in regard to the world. How do the authors of the document face up to the phenomenon of the Reformation which clearly resulted in what could be called "scandalous divisions," to use the document's own terms? The formation of the "Lutheran church" (small 'c') was necessary "to sustain the confessional moment preserve the 'Gospel' in the face of human traditions," i.e., presumably the papacy. The same rationale is seen in the formation of the Missouri Synod in the nineteenth century. The same reason offered for the formation of the Lutheran Church in the sixteenth century and the Missouri Synod in the nineteenth is offered for the possibly necessary division now envisioned by the framers of The Church's One Foundation: "We cannot and we will not compromise the Gospel in order to preserve the human institution that is The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." There is a remarkable consistency in how the sixteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century problems are viewed. Where the "Gospel" is not permitted to be the only source of authority by the human ecclesiastical institution (i.e., Rome in the sixteenth century, other Lutheran denominations in the nineteenth century, and the Missouri Synod in the twentieth century), there the formation of and separation into a "confessional movement" is not only permissible, but required. Certainly, some scholars, if not most, will question, this document's understanding of the sixteenth and nineteenth century problems. Here might be an example of how church history

¹⁵ Missouri in Perspective, 2.

¹⁶ Missouri in Perspective, 21.

can be adjusted philosophically or theologically. Nevertheless, the document applies its principle consistently. On the other hand, fellowship is not only permissible but demanded by the document where the Gospel principle is tolerated.

Every school of theological thought has its heresy, i.e., a doctrine or position that it cannot tolerate if its own system is to survive. For *The Church's One Foundation*, the heresy is any attitude intolerant of making the Gospel the only basis of religious authority. Where this principle is affirmed, fellowship is possible and demanded. Where it is denied, fellowship can no longer exist. For the document the heresy may be designated as "legalism," "institutional glory," and "self-satisfied isolationism," in brief. "sectarian."

The Church's One Foundation views "the Church" as all Christian denominations. Together they are called "the whole Body of Christ." It is recognizable by baptism of "Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." "Lutheranism" is not to be viewed so much as a separate denomination, but as a movement marked by loyalty to the catholic creeds and the Lutheran symbols. Denominational barriers are to be transcended so that Lutherans my share their unique gifts with others. The only possible barrier to fellowship is an attitude that forbids the exercise of the "Gospel" principle. The Church's One Foundation claims that it has a doctrinal position. It does, the maintenance of the "Gospel" principle as authority. "The Gospel is our very life, and the only ground and hope for true unity. We cannot permit it to be compromised." 20

C. OTHER ISSUES

Because of the nature of *The Church's One Foundation*, it cannot handle all issues raised adequately; it is simply too short to do so. "Gospel" and "the Church" receive the lion's share of attention. Every theological movement has certain issues which distinguish it from other positions. "Gospel" and "the church" seem to share the limelight in *The Church's One Foundation*. Other issues, however, are alluded to and a few comments might be in order here.

1. Salvation and damnation. The failure to distinguish the believing and saved church from the unbelieving and damned world can be noted. This is central to the Gospel of John, where the world does not receive Jesus as the Savior and must suffer damnation by God as a just consequence. This position is assumed by the present writer to be basic to Christianity and not to be debated here. Reflecting the thinking of "the theology of hope," however, salvation, for *The Church's One Foundation*, seems to envelop the whole world. "God intends that the Church's unity be manifest to the world, so that the

¹⁷ Missouri in Perspective, 7.

¹⁸ Missouri in Perspective, 7.

¹⁹ Missouri in Perspective, 8. One aside: Why should baptism be so important to the scheme, except for the fact that it has been honored by hoary tradition in the ancient and Lutheran churches? Why not elevate Holy Communion or something else to the status of a necessary prerequisite to membership in "the church"? To make baptism a necessary component part of the Christian community seems to negate the principle that the "Gospel" is the unifying principle, unless baptism is defined as a necessary sign of the "Gospel." But why?

²⁰ Missouri in Perspective, 9.

world may see in that beloved community a sign of the future offered in promise to the whole of humankind."²¹ The lack of a specific article on damnation, moreover, tends to confirm one's suspicions of the presence of universalism in the document. This same concept seems to lie behind the statement, "Jesus is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all."²² "Lord" is used here in the sense of Savior and not in the sense absolute divine sovereignty. For although the day is coming that all heaven and hell will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus (Philippians 2), hell will scarcely hail Him as Redeemer, Savior, and Atoner.

2. The Origin and Function of the Holy Scripture. Much has already been said of how The Church's One Foundation no longer sees the Bible as the basic authority. Something must be said in addition on how it sees the Bible's origin and use. It has been said that "Gospel" is viewed in the document as a proclamation of what the Christian community says and does. It follows quite naturally, then, that the Scriptures are viewed as productions of the Christian community. "As to the Scriptures, we believe that the Old Testament, received from God's first chosen people, and the New Testament, written and collected in the early Christian community, are indeed given by God. They are a unique part of the tradition of God's people, written by pen and inspired by the Holy Spirit who, it is promised, will lead us into all truth."23 The collecting of the Bible by the community is made primary. It is part of the tradition of the church. Inspiration only follows the writing. Viewing the Scriptures as community products finds its origin in Friedrich Schleiermacher's thought, which saw the community as the principle of religious authority. This idea seems fundamental to The Church's One Foundation. Suffice it to say here that the promise of the Spirit's leading us into all truth was made only to the apostles, not, as the document suggests, to "us," i.e., the church or the Christian community. The promise applies only partially and indirectly to us - that is, in so far as we listen to and learn from the testimony of the apostles, which we know, on the basis of this promise (John 16), is completely truthful, without error of any kind. That errorless apostolic testimony consists for us today, of course, in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament.

The Church's One Foundation says some things, moreover, about the use of the Bible. It is asserted, for example, that the historical-critical method is to be used to examine our own partial understanding of the Scriptures. There is scarcely enough offered, however, to warrant a comment on this point. The Scriptures are seen in relationship to Jesus Christ. The purpose of Scriptural study in the Church is to find out what the Bible says about God's gracious purpose in Jesus Christ. This statement is, of course, very true in and of itself, but, as it stands in the context of the document under discussion, we are once again confronted with the problem of how we know

²¹ Missouri in Perspective, 2.

²² Missouri in Perspective, 4.

²³ Missouri in Perspective, 12.

²⁴ Missouri in Perspective, 13.

²⁵ Missouri in Perspective, 17.

about Jesus. For if it is the Bible *per se* which determines our understanding of the Bible, then the Bible becomes the principle or source of authority. Yet, this position has been so frequently condemned in *The Church's One Foundation* (as previously noted in this paper) that nothing more has to be said about it here. We are compelled to deduce, therefore, that the authors of *The Church's One Foundation* distinguish between such parts of the Bible as are determinative for our understanding of God's gracious purpose in Jesus Christ and such parts of the Bible as are not determinative for this understanding. What, then, is the higher authority by which we can distinguish between parts of Scripture in this manner? For the document before us, the answer is evidently "the working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel," or the product of this action, "faith." And we must remember that this "Gospel," in turn, is an emanation from and expression of the community. Thus, we are left dangling in midair on a frayed thread of a "faith" such as might be woven by Kierkegaardians or Barthians, but scarcely by true Lutherans.

3. Miracles. The brief section on miracles is ambivalent. The Church's One Foundation states that "the Scriptures record many extraordinary events, including miracles performed by prophets, apostles, and by our Lord himself."27 But it takes no definite position on whether or not miracles really happened. It simply states that they are recorded. This assertion skirts the whole issue. Miracles are included within the category of "extraordinary events." Extraordinary events, I should say, are not necessarily miraculous. They are simply events which we do not expect. Just how, then, do "miracles" fit into the category of "extraordinary events"? Jesus chased out the money changers from the temple. This was an extraordinary event in His day. Is the raising of Lazarus cut from the same cloth? This ambivalent handling of miracles is only compounded by the following statement: "The question is not whether God is strong enough to do such extraordinary things; the mystery is that a God of such strength made himself so weak for our salvation."28 Instead of discussing miracles, we are told to direct our gaze to the weakness of God. Is not the issue of miracles being skirted again in another way? How would the weakness of God, presumably in Jesus, have any meaning if it were not for the demonstration of His might in miracles?

We are faced next with an apparently blatant contradiction. We have previously been told, "By God's grace we are called to manifest, celebrate and proclaim the *signs* of the Kingdom's coming. The chief such sign is our Lord's cross and resurrection victory over sin and death." Now we are told, "The community that God gathers and sustains around baptismal font, pulpit, and communion table does not approach the Bible seeking to be amazed by *sings* and wonders" (i.e., "extraordinary events, including

²⁶ Missouri in Perspective, 15.

²⁷ Missouri in Perspective, 17.

²⁸ Missouri in Perspective, 17.

²⁹ In addition, one obtains the definite impression from the context that the "signs" from Jesus' life are understood in the same sense as the "signs" discussed in Augustana XIII which are marks of the Christian community. If this is so, some intolerable leaps of logic have been miraculously accomplished.

miracles").³⁰ Is not the resurrection a sign in the sense of a miracle? When we gather together, are we not amazed by the sign of the resurrection in at least some way? Which is it, a religion with the sign of the resurrection or one without the sign of the resurrection?

There are, in fact, two other symptoms of confusion, in the sentence, "The chief such sign is our Lord's cross and resurrection victory over sin and death."31 In the first place, cross and resurrection are not one sign, but two! There is, moreover, a confusion of the signs with the theological truth which such historical signs signify. For our Lord's victory over sin and death is not a sign but the thing signed. Our Lord's victory is the theological truth. The historical events of the crucifixion and the resurrection serve as signs of this victory. Let not the reader think these criticisms picayunish. We must remember that, for Tillich, cross and resurrection become one. In fact, for Tillich the Cross of Jesus is His resurrection victory. Others are willing to assert a resurrection victory for Jesus and leave unanswered the questions of the signs, namely whether there were an empty tomb and a resuscitation of His dead body, i.e., an actual physical resurrection. Without judging the intentions of the writers of *The Church's One* Foundation, such opinions are tolerated and, yes, even suggested by the wording of the document, "resurrection victory." Because of the theological climate, especially in New Testament studies in the Western world today, no ambivalence can be tolerated in any contemporary, public confessional document.

4. Sundry Matters. The Church's One Foundation needs much further revision if the authors wish to make a clear confession of their faith. The person of Jesus, for one thing, receives a treatment less than lucid. For example, the phrase, "God reveals himself in history and through history," fails to point out the distinction between world history in general and the special history associated with Israel and Jesus by and in which God worked redemption. Here one gets a reflection again of "theology of hope," which also fails to make this distinction, working with a concept of history which is universally revelatory. The concept of "the incarnation by which God bound himself to our history in Jesus of Nazareth" would be acceptable to an adoptionist.

The Church's One Foundation has been produced at a significant juncture in the history of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and has received acceptance by a prominent portion of this synod's members. We would be amiss in our obligations if we did not give that careful scrutiny to this document which it calls for and deserves. The framers of the document would be amiss also if they failed to provide us with the many clarifications which their assertions demand.

³⁰ Missouri in Perspective, 17.

³¹ Missouri in Perspective, 5.

³² Missouri in Perspective, 13.

³³ Missouri in Perspective, 13.



A RESPONSE TO DAVID LOTZ

(July 1974)

A Response to David Lotz

JULY 1974

THE Reverend David Lotz has taken an interest in the present theological problems of the Missouri Synod and has contributed several essays on its problems. He was given the role of "theologian in residence" for the Atlantic District. It was for the delegates of that district's conventions that he originally prepared three essays, which were later mimeographed for wider distribution. Dr. Lotz offered his three papers in response to the synodical leadership's call for general discussion on "A Statement" and related matters at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. I am offering this contribution in response to Dr. Lotz's request in a letter of July 23, 1974, asking for "any critical comments."

Dr. Lotz's papers were offered as a critique. To offer a critique on the critique can become very complex. I propose simply to respond to Dr. Lotz without getting into the question of whether he has accurately repeated the theological positions of the principal persons involved in the controversy. I assume he has. Thus I have not seen the charges in regard to the suspended president of Concordia Seminary, except where quoted. I have read "A Statement" issued by the synodical president and "Faithful To Our Calling" issued by the former faculty majority of Concordia Seminary, but I have not consulted these documents in any way in making this response.

The essays distributed by Dr. Lotz are: "An Appraisal of the Theological Crisis in the Missouri Synod"; "A Brief Synopsis of the Major Theological-Doctrinal Issues"; and "A Critical Appraisal of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles.*" I shall attempt to examine certain theological principles from these essays and avoid an expository verse by verse commentary. As they were distributed together, I shall treat them as a unit.

In the essay dealing with "A Statement" Dr. Lotz remarks that the reading of his essay "presuppose(s) a fairly high degree of theological sophistication" ("Critical Appraisal," pp.60a-b). This kind of statement puts any respondent in a very embarrassing situation. Any one might be proud to fall into Dr. Lotz's category of "a fairly high degree of theological sophistication." Etymologically the word "sophistication" must be related to the word "sophist." For the sake of self-esteem and self-preservation, I shall respond with a nolo contendere defense to any charge of "theological sophistication." Really the principles brought up by Dr. Lotz are very simple and not at all complicated. He might well be guilty at some points of some poor logic and cumbersome writing, but these are forgivable sins where the suppliant is repentant. Dr. Lotz agrees with me in isolating the real issues: Scriptures versus Gospel as norm, historicity, and the Law in the life of the Christian. Several years ago, I isolated these same issues in several articles. Indeed, it is refreshingly welcome to have someone else, and a person with whom one does not agree, confirm one's hypothesis.

Dr. Lotz sharpens up the position that regard the Gospel as the basic norm for doctrine and the Scriptures as a secondary norm. Superficially, it can be said that both groups arguing the question of authority in the church recognize Scripture as possessing authority. But the question remains as to why the Bible possess authority. In other words, how would each group answer their question: "Where does the Bible get its authority?" Or, "Why should I make the Bible the authority for my Christian life?" Answering these kinds of questions will provide us with the clue to the authority problem in the church.

Dr. Lotz's position - which he claims is that also of the former St. Louis faculty majority – is that the Scriptures are the authority because of the Gospel they contain. "The Scriptures alone are normative because they bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel is accordingly the norm within the Scriptures." ("Appraisal," p. 6). Dr. Lotz's objection is that President Preus and the framers of Resolution 3-09 have incorrectly deduced that the former faculty majority says: "The Gospel alone is normative..." We shall let pass the question of whether Dr. Lotz properly reflects the conclusions of President Preus and others, but he has helped to narrow our vision on the intricacies of the position. This is the position: The Scriptures are authoritative but they get their authority from the Gospel. Let this position be appreciated for its positive value. It asserts that the Gospel is an essential part of the Scriptures and the Scriptures do play a vital role in Christian theology. But whatever positive value the position has is more than counter-balanced by its glaring inadequacies and unacceptable inversions. This position, as enunciated by Dr. Lotz, lowers the Scriptures in the authority scale to the same level as the Lutherans now place their confessions. Lutherans hold that the Bible alone is norma normata, the regulations governed by the Scriptures. In Dr. Lotz's scheme, the Gospel becomes norma normans and the Scriptures become norma normata. For Lutherans, Scriptures do not have an authority derived from a higher principle of the Gospel. Their authority is God's own.

Dr. Lotz sets this new position up against the one previously held, but he is less than fair. "The Scriptures, in sum, are the 'only rule and norm of faith and practice' because of their central content – the doctrine of the Gospel, no because of their particular form as the inspired and infallible Word of God. This is not to say that such inspiration and infallibility are unimportant or unnecessary." By his reference to the "particular form" Dr. Lotz confuses deliberately, I dare say, the mode of inspiration with the fact. "A Statement" holds that the Bible has its authority from God and does not speak to the mode of inspiration as Dr. Lotz suggests.

The Scriptures are authoritative for Dr. Lotz and for those he represents not because of their theological origin but because of their teleological purpose. The older positions said what the Bible "does," it does because of what it "is." The new position says what the Bible "is," it is because of what it "does." For Dr. Lotz, the Scriptures are the Word of God because they serve the Gospel, not because they are given by God through inspiration. This is basically a confusion between Scripture's origin and function. Dr. Lotz's position is consistent in defining Biblical inerrancy as

"utter reliability... achieving its God-ordained purpose" ("Synopsis," p. 5). Inerrancy is no longer defined as being "a not contrary to fact report" but it is defined as God's carrying out his purposes now. Theology becomes teleology, again. He claims that the controversy "should be made to focus on the faculty's proposed definitions of 'inerrancy,' not its supposed denial of 'inerrancy" ("Synopsis," p. 6). This attitude demands a long pause for thought. The former faculty majority, in the opinion of Dr. Lotz, still makes use of the term "inerrancy," but has given it a new meaning. The technical term for this kind of reasoning is equivocation, to "use expressions of double meaning in order to mislead." Does a person have two cows, if he calls a cow "a cow" and a horse "a cow"? The Arians of the fourth century and the Jehovah's Witnesses of the twentieth call Jesus "God" as do confessing Lutherans. But what each group means by "God" is entirely different. This is exactly what Dr. Lotz does with the word "inerrancy." Here is a case of using the traditional terminology but giving it a new meaning.

Furthermore Dr. Lotz states that the term "inerrancy" "is not found as such in either the Bible or the Confessions" ("Synopsis," p. 5). Consider this line of reasoning. Dr. Lotz says the term "inerrancy" is neither of Biblical nor Confessional origin; the term is used by the faculty majority (but with reluctancy, I imagine); and the term has been redefined by the faculty. If this is how the former faculty really feels, then why use the term at all? One could easily get the impression that the word "inerrancy" is used to indicate that the faculty espouses a position that it really does not hold and does not want to hold.

Dr. Lotz's remarks about the necessity of redefinition of the word "inerrancy" to save us from a prescientific world view of a flat earth are not helpful. His statement that "the biblical authors clearly operate with a world view which simply takes for granted a flat earth" is begging the question ("Synopsis," p. 6). If it is so clear, let him produce the evidence.

The matters of Biblical authority, interpretation, historicity, and facticity may be all treated together for the sake of convenience. Dr. Lotz makes a distinction between "historicity" and "factuality." "A Statement" intends that one word explains the other and, in the document, they may be considered synonyms. Dr. Lotz sees that facticity can take other forms besides the historical one. Thus, he sees Genesis 3 as factual in the sense of describing the fallen condition of mankind, but not necessarily historical, in the sense of being one particular episode in time and space. Dr. Lotz's point of contention must be made clear. He is not denying that certain events previously considered historical must now be treated as metaphorical or symbolical, only that they may be so treated ("Synopsis," pp. 6ff. and "Critical Appraisal," p. 6ok). He objects that "A Statement" does not allow metaphorical or symbolical interpretations to the exclusion of historical ones. Genesis 1–3, Jonah, the Synoptic Gospels, and John are mentioned as cases where other than historical interpretations should be allowed.

Regretfully, Dr. Lotz does not set down his principles whereby a given account may be classified as exclusively metaphorical or symbolical and not historical. His reference to "literary forms" without any specifics makes a response rather difficult.

This sentence sums up his position: "Their (faculty majority) position, rather, is that Genesis 2-3, the book of Jonah, and the gospels do not necessarily have to be interpreted, in every detail and in every part, as historical documents, as if the category of historical narrative were the only possible literary form which could be applied to them" ("Synopsis," p. 8; emphases are Dr. Lotz's).

There is general agreement on all sides that the Scriptures use symbolical or metaphorical language. What literature does not? What is disturbing is the illogical jumps of thought. If some language detail is symbolical, this can hardly be interpreted to mean that all or any given part of the whole can or may be symbolical or nonhistorical. For example, Jesus called Herod a fox. This is a metaphor. Does this mean that Jesus Himself possibly becomes a metaphor, or that the events in the life of Jesus may possibly be considered as metaphors rather than parts of history? Jesus spoke parables, but does that mean that Jesus is parabolic? Dr. Lotz seems to believe that the use of a metaphor or poem or whatever literary device excludes the historical (cf. "Critical Appraisal," p. 60k). History can be explained in poems, diaries, autobiographies, etc. Does this mean that what is no longer poetically explained is then historical? Let us grant that Genesis 1 contains poetic language. Does this mean that it cannot be history? Jonah sings a hymn from the belly of the fish about his punishment and deliverance. Does this mean Jonah's sojourn in the fish is not history? There is a poem about the embattled farmers at Concord's bridge. Does the Battle of Concord suddenly become a non-historical event, a metaphor or symbol or whatever because a poet described it? More serious, from the viewpoints of both faith and literature, is Dr. Lotz's remarks that the Gospels "do not purport to be biographical documents in our modern sense of the term, that is, strictly chronological and completely factual accounts of the life of Jesus." ("Synopsis," pp. 8f.). What is Dr. Lotz trying to say? That if something is not written in a chronological outline, it is not factual? History books are written topically and crisscross chronologically, as do newspaper and magazine articles. And what is the official biographical procedure in our modern world? Granted that a first century document will not look like a twentieth century document. Obviously! If it did - like the Book of Mormon a nineteenth century work - it would be regarded as a forgery. Let it also be granted the Gospels seem to have a literary character of their own, sui generis. They are written to present the life and preaching of Jesus to bring people to faith. But how does Dr. Lotz come to the conclusion that they therefore do not purport to be "completely factual accounts of the life of Jesus"? But they do! Dr. Lotz is saying, however, that they are not completely factual accounts. Now let him show where. To use an old dogmatism, let him cite chapter and verse. Why should we value "the complete factuality" of modern "biographical documents"? Which ones? How about the anticipated memoirs of Nixon or Kissinger? How about the trade of the court biographers employed by the heroes themselves to tell "the whole truth"? How about the Rockefeller-financed biography of Arther Goldberg? Who will come forth with the pure historical document, free from all prejudices, deliberate and undeliberate lapses in memory, and with no propagandist purposes at all? If Dr. Lotz is totally unfair in his appraisal of the Gospels, this is only to be balanced by an unhealthy and

uncritical appreciation of modern documents, including those produced by modern historians who seem to be charismatized with near infallibility which he denies to the Biblical writers.

The approach set forth here would also permit the history recorded in the Scriptures to be interpreted as symbols. Something which is only "symbolic" can be classified as "historical" or "factual." "Facticity" does not exhaust the meaning of "historical." Dr. Lotz would permit the statement that the story of Adam and Eve has a certain "factuality" about it, but it could be "symbolic" ("Critical Appraisal," pp. 60j-k). One could say that the story of Adam and Eve did not happen, but it is still "historical." For "A Statement" the term "historical" refers to what happens. For Dr. Lotz it can refer to what happened or to what could possibly be just part of a "symbolic" story.

Dr. Lotz upholds the position that the Gospel is the determining factor or criterion for what is and is not to be believed in the Bible. "There can be no doubt either that the Scripture teaches such matters or that Christians need not accept them because they are not part of the Gospel. Indeed, Christians properly repudiate them because they are part of that Law which came to an end in Jesus Christ" ("Critical Appraisal," p. 60e). Dr. Lotz might not have been aware of his agreement with the position of President Preus in that the Scriptures tell us what the Gospel is. Of course, Dr. Lotz's real intent is that the Gospel tells us what parts of Scripture are applicable. It follows automatically that there can be no third use of the law, the positive, wholesome guide in the Christian's life. The Gospel as the determining principle of what is to be believed and not believed is a natural conclusion from the concept that the Bible gets its authority from the Gospel. If the Gospel has become in effect the *norma normans*, then it follows that the Scriptures, the *norma normata*, have a truth derived from the Gospel and the Scriptures must be constantly judged by the Gospel.

Let us summarize the position of Dr. Lotz up to this point. The Gospel is the principle that gives the Scriptures their authority and they are the critical principle of interpretation in determining what is applicable and what is not applicable. History can be reduced to symbolic truth, as long as the Gospel predominates. "Gospel," regardless of its definition, may operate with or without a specific history. The entire system is quite consistent. The Gospel is the controlling principle.

The only thing remaining is to determine the definition of the Gospel. According to the old definition, the Gospel is the news or report that God redeemed all mankind for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is based on the fact that something specific happened. But it is right here on this very important question that Lotz leaves a yawning gap. Dr. Lotz is not willing to say that the Gospel can be set down in any kind of permanent way. Before we cite a specific statement from Dr. Lotz consider that a "Gospel" which is identified as the controlling factor in the entire scheme, the *norma normans*, has no fixed meaning. Dr. Lotz quotes the faculty as saying, "it (i.e. the Gospel) cannot be formulated in terms enduringly valid for every age and condition" ("Synopsis," p. 11). Mr Lotz specifically denies that the theological task "amounts simply to the meticulous repetition of past theological formulations which presumably retain their power and

persuasiveness for all times" ("Synopsis," p. 13). The Gospel for Dr. Tietjen and for the faculty majority, so claims Dr. Lotz, is "confessing the faith of our fathers anew in our words and our own ways to our own world" ("Synopsis," p. 13).

This amounts to nothing more than the most raw form of subjectivism. The controlling principle in theology then becomes the faculty's own words to its own world. This, masquerading as Gospel, then becomes the principle of Scriptural interpretation. It is the very nature of a norm or rule that it remain, at least somewhat, stable or stationary. But where the norm fluctuates, it can no longer be a norm. Nothing can be regulated. When this kind of Gospel norm is applied to the Scriptures, the results must necessarily be diversified and changing. We have already noted that this whole position confuses theology with teleology. We now recognize more fully the correctness of this conclusion. All would agree that preaching the Gospel must be done in contemporary terms. But, according to Dr. Lotz, it is the Gospel that is preached that decides for us what is of binding value in the Scriptures. With this approach Christianity is released from its history like a helium balloon and is left to every whim and wind that comes along. Whatever good is left in this kind of Christianity only comes out of some type of respect for the memory of the past.

At the root of the problem is false type of bibliolatry. The Bible appears on the scene as a book testifying to the Gospel. This Gospel is its authority, according to this position ("Appraisal," pp. 6f.). The book sits there suspended in mid-air with a message. Listen to its message of the Gospel because of its message, i.e., the Gospel. This is pure bibliolatry, logolatry, or even evangelolatry. The position of "A Statement" sees God's authority in the Scriptures. That at least is "theolotry" and not "bibliolatry."

These words are addressed to the pastors of the Missouri Synod as response to Dr. Lotz's essays, but I do with that they would be shared with the lay delegates of the Atlantic District to whom Dr. Lotz first addressed his words and who will not receive a copy of this essay. For such a wish to be fulfilled, I can only rely on the leaders of the Atlantic District.



GNOSIS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

(October 1974)

Gnosis in the Church Today

OCTOBER 1974

I. Introduction to the Problem

The title of this paper suggests our using the two disciplines, historical theology and theology proper. To spare ourselves long historical debate I have switched the assigned title from "Gnosticism in the Church Today" to "Gnosis in the Church Today." Still, I should like to say a word about historical Gnosticism.

Some recent historical studies separate the gnosis elements from the second-century Gnosticism. One of the basic problems in the study of Gnosticism is that while there is general agreement that there was such a phenomenon as historical Gnosticism, which bloomed in the second century A.D., there is no general agreement concerning its origins or, for that matter, its boundaries.

From April 13 to 18, 1966, a group of recognized scholars assembled as the Colloquium of Messina in Italy to discuss this very topic, and published their essays in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo.*¹ To date, this volume seems the most nearly comprehensive introduction to the problem. The breadth of Gnosticism can easily be detected in the divisions of the topics at the colloquium. "The Definition and the Origins of Gnosticism"; "Gnosticism and Egypt"; "Gnosticism: Iran and Mesopotamia"; "Gnosticism and Greece"; "Gnosticism in Alexandria"; "Gnosticism and Qumran"; "Gnosticism and Christianity"; and "Gnosticism and Buddhism: A Problem in Comparisons."²

There seems to be a kind of general agreement that gnosis resulted from the decline of the ancient religions. Rather than being and original, creative religion, gnosis is a parasitic movement that attached itself to established religion and used its forms. In a general sort of way we are interested in Christian gnosis, i.e., gnosis which expressed its religious thought in Christian rather than Jewish, Egyptian, Persian, or Hellenistic symbols.

The argument of which came first, Christianity or established Gnosticism seems at first blush to be a kind of chicken – or – egg debate. Reitzenstein, Bultmann, and Kretzschmar give priority to Gnosticism and thus see certain elements of Gnosticism in the New Testament. Schlier sees Christianity and Gnosticism as historical twins. Rudolph, Bianchi, and now the young Japanese-American scholar, Edwin Yamauchi, sees Christianity as a parent of Gnosticism.³ R. McL. Wilson in his essay, "Gnosis, Gnosticism and the New Testament," also presents a convincing argument for the last option. He shows that Gnosticism is dependent on Christianity and uses New Testament words, filling them with new meanings. This is precisely one of the problems

¹ Ugo Bianchi, ed., Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967).

² Ibid., pp. vii-x

³ Edwin M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973).

⁴ R. McL. Wilson, "Gnosis, Gnosticism and the New Testament," Bianchi, pp. 511-28.

which the church has had to face today, filling Biblical words with new philosophical meanings. I should like to settle on Wilson's definition of Gnosticism, at least the second century brand. "This second-century Gnosticism is not simply a deviation within Christianity, but the amalgamation of Christian ideas with ideas drawn from other sources." Basically it is a syncretistic movement bringing or merging together worlds of thought whose origins, and hence presuppositions, are foreign to each other.

Before we proceed with the topic proper, we must answer another question, the question of whether it is really confessional to identify gnosis elements in the church today, roughly 1700 years since the time of historical Christian Gnosticism. I believe that on this point we have a clear mandate from the Lutheran Confessions, especially the Augustana. We fail to be confessional if we understand the *damnamus* sections as being mere historical strictures on heretics long dead and buried. The chances of an Arian or Eunomian announcing himself as such are slim. In passing the doctrinal condemnation on erring teachers in the past, sixteenth century Lutherans intended to identify themselves with what they understood to be the catholic and orthodox church and at the same time to alter Christians to the appearance of similar heresies in their own time. The Lutheran Confessions require of each of us to make his own deductions and applications. In the case of the radical left wing of the Reformation, this group is specifically identified and condemned as the new Samosatenes, though its members might never have heard of Paul of Samosata.

I trust that there is agreement among us that Gnosticism or gnosis is an amalgamation of heresies, not to be tolerated in the church. If we should need any convincing on this point, we should be reminded of Augustana I where the Valentinians, second-century Gnostics are condemned first in the list of heretics.⁷

Besides providing a confessional apology for a topic which compares historical and contemporary phenomena, I must say that we are not the first to establish such parallels. Albright refers to Toynbee, Tillich, and Schweitzer as modern Gnostics. Milton D. Hunnex in an article in *Christianity Today* saw in religionless Christianity a new form of Gnosticism.⁸ Simply to search for similarities or parallels between current religious phenomena and past historical religious movements does not guarantee that our search will meet with success; but it is certainly a permissible task, from both confessional and scholarly viewpoints, to look for a pattern of gnosis in current religious phenomena. Only our evidence will be able to pronounce this venture successful.⁹

⁵ Ibid., p. 512.

⁶ Cf. Hans-Werner Gensichen, We Condemn: How Luther and 16th-Century Lutheranism Condemned False Doctrine, tr. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Hosue, 1967).

⁷ Die Benkenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, sixth edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967) p. 51n.

⁸ Christiantiy Today, X, 335-7.

⁹ Some might question the validity of this kind of research paper. In this kind of a matter no one is looking to establish a one-for-one equation. History never repeats itself that exactly. The differences between the second century and the current time must be maintained. The reader is referred to the various subjects handled at the Colloquy of Messina to see that the comparison which is attempted here is legitimate research. Certainly, the topic

II. WHAT DEFINITION OF THE GNOSIS IS TO BE USED?

One section of *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo* is devoted specifically to the problem of definition.¹⁰ Among the six contributing authors there is not one English-speaking writer. Conveniently, the most helpful chapter in the six was written by a Dutchman, who favored us by writing in English.¹¹ Th. P. Van Baaren organized a seminar workinggroup at the University of Groningen with the expressed purpose of defining "gnosis." A very cautious man, he writes, "Gnosticism as such is an organic historic complex that cannot be satisfactorily analyzed simply by resolving it into its elements." Rather than standing despairingly on the edge of a definitionless abyss, Van Baaren, to nail Gnosticism down, singles in on the gnosis and offers what he calls "a shorter or longer list of characteristics of this religious complex, open to corrections and additions." It is a list, "open to corrections and additions," of course, that will serve as our standard and pattern in looking at current problems in the church today.

Here in brief, are eight elements of the gnosis upon which comment will be made: (1) gnosis as revelation; (2) gnosis as secret; (3) the rejection or allegorization of the Old Testament and the allegorization of the New Testament; (4) God as transcendent and present in aeons; (5) the distinction between *gnosis* and *pistis*; (6) asceticism and the antinomianism or libertinism; (7) differentiating between the Heavenly Savior and the human shape of Jesus of Nazareth; and (8) Christ as Revealer

III. DEFINITIONS OF GNOSIS ADDRESSED

(1) "Gnosis considered as knowledge is not primarily intellectual, but is based upon revelation and is necessary for the attainment of full salvation." The distinction between revelational and intellectual religion should be made clear. Revelational religion makes the supernatural revelation the basis or criterion of truth. Essentially revelational religion is a form of mysticism. Christianity is the proclamation of a supernatural revelation, but it is not a revelational religion because its yardstick of truth is history, especially the historical event of the resurrection, and not revelation. Intellectual religion is what we call historical religion. It involves the intellect and the senses, of hearing, seeing, and touching in the apprehending of religious or revelational truth in the manner described in 1 John 1:1f. The comprehension of personal salvation is revelational in the sense that it worked by a revelation of God. Compare Matthew 16:17. However, direct naked revelation is not the evidence of itself.

It is not difficult to detect here a similarity between the gnosis and the antiintellectual thrust of neoorthodoxy in our time.¹³ Barth, a chief proponent of the school of neoorthodoxy, offered the church a theology of the revelation in which intellectual

[&]quot;Gnosis in the Church Today" seems appropriate and more capable of a satisfactory completion than the topic "Gnosticism and Buddhism: A Problem in Comparison." Bianchi, pp. 651-87.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.161-226.

¹¹ Th. B. van Baaren, "Towards a definition of Gnosticism," Branchi, pp. 174-80.

¹² Ibid., p. 178.

¹³ The reaction to the anti-intellectual or anti-historical bias of Barthian neoorthodoxy can be seen particularly in the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, for whom history alone is the mode of revelation.

knowledge, what is known through history, was subsumed under the category of the encounter, the moment of revelation. Among some disciples, like Baillie, the revelation can be so independent of the specific Christian message that it no longer needs the historic Christian phenomena.¹⁴

Neoorthodoxy, especially the Barthian strain, received a hearty welcome in some Missouri Synod circles because of the herald of neoorthodoxy was heard as the war cry against Rationalism.¹⁵ However, neoorthodoxy was not just anti-rationalistic, it was non-rational in the sense of non-intellectual and non-historical. It was an attempt to sidestep the really tough historical questions of the nineteenth-century historical quest for Jesus. Neoorthodoxy fell into Spinoza's trap of separating theology and secular knowledge into unrelated spheres.

A hallmark of revelation theology is that the revelational content is the proof and evidence of its own revelation. Mormonism, Mohammedanism, and Buddhism are revelational religions. Revelational religion, Christian or non-Christian, is, by defining its own boundaries, safe from investigative scrutiny, but at the same time there is no convincing reason that someone else should accept for the validity of one revelational religion over against another one. For example, in neoorthodoxy, everyone has to have his own encounter to verify for himself the truth that the encounter is indeed the moment of revelation. Revelational religion is always subjectivistic. The revelation is totally immune from any outside or objective historical investigation of its revelation. Only those who have the revelation can verify it.¹⁶

This type of revelational theology has appeared in Lutheran theology in other forms besides the generous transfusion of Barthianism. The charismatic movement is clearly revelational. The moment of truth is not found in the careful, arduous study of the Holy Scriptures but in a new birth in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ The person who receives the Holy Spirit anew becomes superior in theological acumen to the scholar of the Bible who has not had the benefit of the enlightening rebirth. At its heart, the charismatic movement is anti-intellectual.

At other points, moreover, in the history of Lutheranism, the argument of the internum testimonium spiritus sancti has sometimes been offered as the proof for

¹⁴ John Baille, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 137. Here is an example: "The Sphinx in the Egyptian desert is the true representation of Deity."

¹⁵ A thorough study of the introduction of neoorthodoxy into Missouri Synod theology must still be made. Neoorthodoxy offered in its program several elements that were part of the Missouri Synod theology. (1) Both recognized a common opponent in eighteenth-century Rationalism and in nineteenth-century theology under the influence of Schleiermacher. (2) Both operated under the banner of "Word theology." What Missouri Synod theology and neoorthodoxy meant by this was entirely different. In addition, the term "neoorthodox" was very close to the term "orthodox," so frequently used by the Missouri Synod theologians.

¹⁶ Let it be repeated that the theology of hope is the reaction of its representatives against the revelational theology of neoorthodoxy. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, tr. Margaret Clarkson (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971), pp. 13-15.

¹⁷ One former Missouri Synod pastor relates in a pamphlet his original charismatic experience in which he was overcome by the Holy Spirit in preparing his sermon. He set his Bible aside and let himself be filled with the Spirit. In charismatic Bible study groups, prayer is offered requesting enlightenment of the participants, whose actual Biblical knowledge is admittedly minimal or faulty.

truthfulness of Christianity.¹⁸ Here the charge of revelational Christianity must be applied. I am not speaking to the question of the individual acceptance of Jesus as the Lord, Christ, etc. – this, as St. Paul says, can only be worked by the Holy Spirit – but to the question of the existence of God, the moral law, and the life of Jesus, especially His miracles and resurrection. These are truths comprehensible without any revelation.¹⁹ Their meanings, however, are revelational.

In "The Church's One Foundation" revelational religion clearly replaces an intellectual one. "The Church's One Foundation" belongs to the category of revelational religions as it offers faith as the answer to the question "How do I know the Gospel is true?" Thus, in responding to the truth-question, history is substituted for faith. A contrary position is offered by John's Gospel where the Scriptures provide the historical linkage between the history of Jesus and the Church today. "The Church's One Foundation" makes the Gospel the basis for its own authority. Here revelation becomes the evidence for itself."

- (2) "Gnosticism claims to have a revelation of its own which is essentially secret." Without much difficulty, many have seen gnosis in the lodges, especially the Free Masons and Rosicrucians.²³ This characterization could apply to any nominal Christian group gathered in conventicles reserved for the religious elite. This charge applies to the charismatic movement where private prayer meetings provide the divine spiritual illumination not available in the regular services of the church open to all.
- (3) "The Old Testament is usually rejected with more or less force. If not fully rejected it is interpreted allegorically. The same method of exegesis is as a rule chosen for the New Testament." The gnosis hermeneutic of allegorizing history is a natural concomitant of the dualistic world-view which separated matter and spirit. History, which deals with things once created, would have to be allegorically adjusted in gnosis thought because the world's creation, the basis of history, was itself an evil act. Among some in the Missouri Synod the act of an historical creation as outlined in Genesis 1 and 2 is frequently considered an opinion intellectually unacceptable. Subsequent Biblical history has also in some cases been treated as allegory to avoid the embarrassment of history.

In the Missouri Synod, we have experienced, not a *de lege*, but a *de facto* rejection of the Old Testament. Any approach that substitutes allegory for history in the Old Testament is *de facto* a rejection of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is basically history, the history of God's people and of God's faithfulness to His promise. Where

¹⁸ In Orthodox Lutheran theology the internal testimony of the Spirit is equated with faith and is the result of the Spirit's working in the Scriptures as the record of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The internal testimony of the Spirit is not substituted for the historical evidences of Christianity. Cf. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), I, p. 120. In Schleiermacher's theology faith does become the basis of truth.

¹⁹ Cf. Romans 1 and 2; Acts 17:22-23.

²⁰ Cf. my "The Church's One Foundation," The Springfielder, XXXVIII (December 1974), p. 220.

²¹ John 20:30f.

²² Cf. my "The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod," The Springfielder, XXXVI (December 1972), pp. 156-71.

²³ Christianity Today, op. Cit.

an allegorical operation transforms Old Testament history into allegory, the Old Testament loses its essential character and, hence, no longer serves its original purpose and therefore becomes eventually useless.

President J. A. O. Preus has been speaking to these and related issues in recent editions of the *Lutheran Witness* in the series of articles entitled "With One Voice." Famous, in our circles, are the assertions that Genesis 1-11 and the book of Jonah are allegory. In general, any type of redactional criticism that relegates history to the level of adiaphoron is allegorizing.

The question of the permissibility of substituting allegory for history under the slogan of exegetical freedom must be examined. Like many slogans, the slogan of exegetical freedom is chanted by the mobs, in this case the academic theologians, without any thorough examination of its meaning.24 In regard to the understanding of any document, there is no truly absolute exegetical freedom. Every honest scholar of literature attempts to understand it in the sense which its author intended. This principle applies equally to the Bible and any other literature. There is no exegetical freedom to treat analogy as history or to treat history as analogy. The Bible is clear in presenting analogy as analogy and history as history. Where history, especially in the New Testament, is dissolved into allegory, not only does Christianity lose its historical character but the incarnation itself totters on the brink of dissolution. This point in the theological continuum, indeed, has been reached, not only by the second century Gnostics, but also by influential New Testament scholars, including Lutherans, in our time. The failure of the interpreter to recognize history as history and analogy as analogy is a literary transgression from which the penalty of a literary defrocking must be carried out without mercy. Where cold fact and analogy are merged, so that these distinctions are fused into one kind of discourse, language, which exists only to communicate, no longer communicates. Like saltless salt, confused language should be trodden under foot. Meaningless language or language with two meanings that are materially contradictory is no language. This unwelcomed inheritance has been bequeathed to our generation by the neoorthodox school.

(4) "God is conceived as transcendent... God is conceived as beyond the comprehension of human thought ... God's transcendence may be qualified by the appearance of various beings intermediate between God and the Cosmos, usually called aeons. These beings are as a rule conceived as divine emanations." Van Baaren's description of the gnosis theory of a transcendent God is applicable without too much readjustment to Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. In Barthian theology, the only recognizable emanation of the transcendent God is Christ.²⁵ However, in the case of Paul Tillich, the Christomonistic revelation is universalized.

²⁴ All slogans, regardless of origin, should be given a total reappraisal occasionally to see whether they have become dogmaticisms that do not even have internal unity. The British scholar James Barr did much to dispel the unnatural chasm between Greek and Hebrew thought forms that had become the dogmaticisms of many students of theology. In Missouri Synod circles, "Gospel" frequently denotes an ill-defined or undefined dogmaticism. In the 1960's some suggested a moratorium of the word "God." Could we perhaps make the same suggestion for the word Gospel? This second suggestion will meet with as little success as did the first.

²⁵ Sebastian A. Matczak, Karl Barth on God (New York: St. Paul Publications, 1962) pp. 79-87.

For Tillich most everything is capable of becoming a bearer of revelation. ²⁶ Given the right revelatory situation or constellation, the transcendent God can reveal Himself. In this Tillichian theology, God is there and not there at the same time. In His immanence God is transcendent. In the gnosis concept, God is removed as a kind of "Wholly Other," but He is present in multiple situations through the emanations. It is doubtful whether Tillichian thought is any less fanciful than crass Gnosticism with its multiple aeons. Both gnosis and modern approaches are destructive of the historical claim of Christianity, which makes for itself an exclusive claim in the area of revelation. The contemporary emanation theology of Paul Tillich can eventually result in universalism or atheism – and has!

(5) "Gnosticism makes a clear difference between pistis and gnosis." This characteristic of gnosis, offered by Van Baaren must be treated together with gnostic anthropology. "Human beings are divided into three classes, according to whether they have gnosis or not. The pneumatics, who possess full gnosis, are by nature admitted to full salvation. Those who have only pistis, may at least attain a certain degree of salvation. Those who are fully taken up with the material world have no chance of salvation at all." Gnosis is the Greek word for knowledge and pistis the word for faith. However, the gnostic meaning of these words are just the opposite. In Gnosticism, "Faith," pistis, was intellectual "knowledge," gnosis was esoteric.

The "Church's One Foundation" divides the church into two categories reminiscent of gnostic categories of "pneumatics" and those who have faith only, the people who operate with intellect. There is bound to be confusion because the terms "knowledge" and "faith" mean exactly the opposite of what the words seem to suggest.

The sub-standard class in the gnosis, those who have faith only, i.e., those who have only an intellectual awareness, is parallel to those whom the "Church's One Foundation" censures for being guilty of near idolatry because they say, "I believe whatever the Bible says." The "Church's One Foundation" states that such a procedure of believing whatever the Bible says will not guarantee advancement to the higher step of "finding the grace of God in Christ."²⁷ The Gospel is Gospel simply because it is the Gospel or because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the principle of factual or historical verification. In the "Church's One Foundation" Spirit-proof is substituted for historical proof as it is conveyed by the apostolic and prophetic writings.

The same type of general criticism can be leveled with even less need for explanation at the charismatic movement. The same gnostic designation, "pneumatic," can be applied to those who have had this unique experience with the Holy Spirit, which other Christians, the ordinary people, have not had.

(6) "The essentially dualistic world-view leads as a rule to an extremely ascetic system or ethics, but in some cases, we find an 'Umwertune aller Werte' expressed in complete libertinism." From my own seminary days in the late 1950's I know that sexual asceticism has been espoused in our circles as a religiously valuable way of life. Articles on the subject were offered

²⁶ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), I, p. 118.

²⁷ Missouri in Perspective, I, pp. 221-2.

in the student publication of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, at the time. However, it is the other extreme of libertinism, at least in a theoretical sense, that represents the current danger in the church. Rather than use the term libertinism as suggested by Van Baaren, the term antinomianism as suggested by Edwin M. Yamauchi might be the more discreet.²⁸ We are interested here in establishing a theoretical parallel, not in offering specific examples of antinomian behavior. E. Conze states the gnostic morality as well as anyone: "The exalted spiritual condition generated in the perfect by the power of full understanding must of necessity cause a certain disdain for the puny demands of conventional morality. In consequence some Gnostic sects taught that once a man has gained salvation, he is free to disregard moral obligations."²⁹ Since Paul Tillich has been frequently recognized as a latter-day proponent of the gnosis, it might not be inappropriate to call attention to his wife's expose of Tillich's extracurricular activities in *Paulus*, her biography of her husband.

Lutheranism, however, has been misunderstood from the very beginning as also being antinomian. Augustana XX was a defense of the Lutheran position that good works were commanded by God. Article VI of the Formula of Concord goes over the same ground, but more carefully.

One of the concerns of the Missouri Synod's New Orleans Convention was the denial of the use of the law in the life of the Christian. The suspicions were confirmed in the first article of the first issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*, a journal published in St. Louis. Traugott H. Rehwaldt in "Is The Law A Guide For Good Works?" seems to provide a clearly negative answer to this question when he concludes, "We have tried to point out in this paper that the bald statement in that the Law serves as a guide and norm for the good works of the Christian strikes a note that is not in harmony with FC VI and with Luther's other writings."³⁰ Is the "Gospel" morality with its basic antinomianism only gnosis?

In "Theses on Law and Gospel,"³¹ I spoke to this entire issue and will not repeat what I said there. However, I believe that the denial of the Law in the life of the Christian *qua* Christian is intimately connected with a general approach to the Bible, especially the Old Testament, whereby the Law is regarded as an inferior product of God. The position that the Law is the inferior product of God is not far removed from the historic gnostic position that the Law is the product of the inferior God of the Old Testament, i.e., the Demiurge.

(7) "In Connection with the basic dualism there is a strong tendency to differentiate between the Heavenly Savior and the human shape of Jesus of Nazareth. This has led to varying solutions of which Docetism is the most prominent one." The dualism of gnosis, which involved a separation between world and spirit, necessarily resulted in a shelving of any real

²⁸ Edwin Yamauchi, Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 53-63.

²⁹ E. Conze, "Gnosticism and Buddhism," Bianchi, p. 659.

³⁰ Currents in Theology and Mission, I, p. 9.

³¹ The Springfielder, XXXVII (June 1973), pp. 53-63.

kind of incarnation.³² A spirit of dualism has been introduced into a contemporary Christianity since at least the time of Immanuel Kant. This dualism of theology and history I paralleled to the gnostic dualism of spirit and world and has been basic to New Testament studies in our time. Elert sees a practical denial of the incarnation in the Calvinistic interpretation of the Lord's Supper.³³

Essentially, the division between theology and history is only a modern form of Nestorianism which so separates divine and human elements that incarnational theology becomes impossible. With such a dualistic philosophy, Christianity cannot survive as historic Christianity, though it might survive as some kind of philosophy. Ontological dualism is not a simple heresy in the sense that only one concept or area of Christian truth is touched. Ontological dualism spells the death of Christianity. The words, "And the word was made flesh," lose their foundation. The lifeblood of contemporary New Testament studies has been the search for the historical Jesus divorced from the Christ of faith. History and faith operate separately. This Christological dualism has been expressed in many ways, but it is the basic philosophical presupposition for most current studies of the four Gospels. To separate the Christ of the church's faith from the Jesus of history is the most easily recognizable and blatant form of the gnosis in the church today. It is even conveniently reminiscent of the gnostic slogan of "the Heavenly Savior and the humans shape of Jesus of Nazareth."

(8) Another characteristic of the gnosis was to consider Christ's essential work as revelatory rather than atoning. "In most systems Christ is regarded as the great point of reversal in the cosmic process. As evil has come into existence by the fall of a former aeon, so Christ ushers in salvation because he proclaims the unknown God, the good God who had remained a stranger until that moment."

Several points can be made here. Neoorthodoxy is basically a religion of revelation, not of atonement in the sense of death for sins or justice. Gnosis and neoorthodoxy emphasize Christ as the Revealer. Even the historical event of the Cross receives its meaning because it is the highest moment of revelation, not because of interaction between God and Jesus. Tillich saw the Cross as the proclamation of Christ's Easter victory. The theology of hope also sees the Cross as the moment when God reveals his association with the downtrodden and distressed. In all these systems, Christ and the Cross find their ultimate value as revelation, not as atonement. At best, atonement is merged or submerged into revelation.

The older liberalism of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth also saw Jesus as the great Revealer of God from an ethical viewpoint, not as the agent of

³² The Colloquy of Messina spoke to several understandings of dualism. Three types were delineated: anti-cosmic, Zoroastrian, and metaphyisical. Bianchi, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

³³ Werner Elert, The Lord's Supper Today, tr. Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), pp. 36-37.

³⁴ Pannenberg among contemporary theologians attempts to correct this current dualism by substituting history as a monistic principle understanding of reality. Johannes B. Metz has a similar understanding.

³⁵ Tillich, II, pp. 158-9.

³⁶ Moltmann, p. 106.

atonement. Jesus teaches us how to live. Going back further in the nineteenth century to Schleiermacher, Jesus was viewed, not as the agent of atonement, but as the Revealer of the ultimate God-Consciousness.³⁷ All of these views have something in common. They must regard the Old Testament as an inferior revelation or no revelation at all. The inferior salvation in the Old Testament resulted from the inferior revelation. *Gnosis* means knowledge, and for the gnosis Jesus must appear as the ultimate Revealer of divine knowledge.

IV. CONCLUSION

Some might call gnosis simply an overemphasis on certain concepts or readjustment to the meaning of certain terms. But this fact makes gnosis the most dangerous kind of movement in any age – second, seventeenth, or twentieth century. It appears as only slight readjustment, but the slight readjustment destroys Christianity under the pretense that gnosis itself is Christianity.

The current movement within the Missouri Synod, by substituting *sola fide* and *sola gratia* for *the sola Scriptura* as the source of doctrine, is essentially gnostic in approach. *Sola gratia* and *sola fide* replace the *sola Scriptura* in the determination of the truth. By eliminating the *sola Scriptura*, and here the *sola* must be emphasized, as the one and only principle of determining what is truth, and by substituting the *sola gratia* and *sola fide* as the criteria of the truth, Christianity becomes a revelation religion, not only to the exclusion of being an intellectual or historical religion, but also to the exclusion of being the religion of the atonement.

For Lutheranism, however, the cognitive issue, the determination of the truth is answered by *sola Scriptura*, not *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. The soteriological issues of how salvation was acquired and how it is personally appropriated are answered by *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.

Where *sola gratia* and *sola fide* are transferred to another sphere in order to serve as answers to the cognitive question, then the soteriological questions have no answer. What is more dangerous is that where the soteriological questions are no answered with *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, all other possible answers must necessarily be wrong. The net result of depriving the soteriological questions of the answers of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* is that the new answer will be *operibus*, a religion of works.

³⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. 461-3.



THE LAW-GOSPEL DEBATE IN THE MISSOURI SYNOD CONTINUED

(April 1976)

The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod Continued

APRIL 1976

In a previous issue of *The Springfielder*, my colleague Dr. Raymond Surburg prepared a review article on Paul Bretscher's *After the Purifying*.¹ It is not the custom of our journal to review books twice unless there is some special reason to do so. I believe that such a reason exists. Several years ago, I attempted to analyze theologically some of the historical roots that have brought us to the current impasse in Missouri Synod theology in an article entitled "The Law-Gospel Debate in The Missouri Synod."² In that article I attempted to isolate one factor to the exclusion of all others that could uniquely be attributed to what I took the liberty of dubbing the "Valparaiso theology." The term "Valparaiso" was used because the most prominent opponents of the theology in "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" had in one way or another been associated with that university in northeastern Indiana. My response discussed Paul G. Bretscher's article, "The Log in Your Own Eye," which was in part a response to "A Statement."

Nearly five years have passed since I wrote about Dr. Bretscher's position, which was the classical expression of the "Valparaiso Theology,"⁴

The "Valparaiso Theology" holds that Gospel, as the preached good news about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins, is the basis of theological work. It also holds that the Scriptures when used by themselves can lead to conflicting opinions and thus the Gospel as the presupposition of faith must be used in approaching the Scriptures.

Shortly following I made a specific reference to Dr. Bretscher's position,⁵ He who has faith in Christ or a divinely given wisdom will know the Scripture. Faith in the Gospel precedes any commitment to the Scriptures or any form of them, e.g. a paraphrase. It is article that can be joined at any point.

Bretscher's After the Purifying⁶ may be considered a sequel to "The Log in Your Own Eye." Both may be viewed as reactions to significant happenings in the Missouri Synod. I shall let the reader provide his own chronological listing of events in the Missouri Synod between April 1972 and April 1975. The publication of Bretscher's new book is not just another event in the history of publishing. It is being provided to

¹ The Springfielder, XXXIX, 4 (March 1976), pp. 212-215.

² Ibid., XXXVI, 3 (December 1972), pp. 156-171.

³ Concordia Theological Monthly, XLIII (April 1972), pp. 232-247.

⁴ The Springfielder, XXXVI, 3, p. 158.

⁵ Ibid., p. 159

⁶ Paul G. Bretscher, After the Purifying, Thirty-second Yearbook, Lutheran Education Association (River Forest, Illinois: Lutheran Education Association, 1975).

most parochial school teachers of the Missouri Synod through the Lutheran Education Association. A letter from Donald Kell, the association's president, states that eight thousand copies have already been sold. A second printing might be necessary. Special rates are making the widest distribution possible.⁷

I hesitate to identify the theological position of Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM). When I analyzed a document presented to the August 1974 convention of that group, Richard J. Neuhaus, the competent spokesman for ELIM, said in *Forum Letter* that I had taken the document more seriously than anyone who drafted or adopted it. Let us hope that our dear brother was exaggerating at least for those of us who take seriously the present controversy. How disappointed some would be if they found out they had been attacking verbal windmills.

In a not-so-subtle way Bretscher's After the Purifying is a direct reaction to recent events in the Missouri Synod, specifically the adoption of "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" and synodical personnel changes. Therefore this book must be understood as furthering the cause of the ELIM group. Its basic purpose is to gain a sympathetic understanding from parochial schoolteachers in the Missouri Synod. On two counts some serious attention must be given it: (1) It represents what may be considered the classical ELIM theology, so far as it is possible for any one person to represent it. (2) It is an attempt to gain a sympathetic hearing for, if not to effect, a total conversion to, the ELIM theological position. Negatively, it would involve a renunciation, at least partially, of the traditional position of the Missouri Synod.

Essential to the theology of the very influential Swiss theologian Karl Barth was a peculiar understanding of a concept called "the Word of God," which was defined as God's address to men. Barth's concept of "the Word of God" involved a vertical invasion of God into our world.¹¹ The Bible was not equated with "the Word of God" but could provide a place where the "the Word of God" could become active, under the right circumstances, in the lives of men.¹² It is hard not to conclude that Bretscher has adopted this totally false and erroneous Barthian view of "the Word of God" and dressed it up in traditional Lutheran terminology to make it digestible for Missourian

⁷ The letter from Donald Kell was accompanied with a study guide to Bretscher's After the Purifying. The study guide is entitled "His Word and Our Ambiguities" and was written by James G. Bauman, a Missouri Synod pastor. It appeared in Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series, III, (Fall 1975). The study guide is written to win the reader to Bretscher's position. Several cartoons in the guide show the difference between conservative and moderate positions in the Missouri Synod. One cartoon character says, "Because I believe the Bible is inspired, I Believe the Gospel." The other says in return, "Because I believe the Gospel, I believe the Bible is inspired." The first is supposedly the conservative position and the second the moderate.

⁸ The Springfielder, XXXVIII, 3 (December 1974), pp. 218-225.

⁹ Richard J. Neuhaus, Forum Letter, IV, 3 (March 1975), p. 5. "Writing in the December issue of The Springfielder (Concordia Seminary, Springfield, IL), "Scaer Challenges the ELIM people to correct what he views as the faults and ambiguities in the statement. In doing so, he demonstrates more seriousness about the statement than has been generally evident in ELIM circles."

¹⁰ After the Purifying, p. ix.

¹¹ Karl Barth, Christian Dogmatics, II, "Doctrine of God," Part 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. 687.

¹² Ibid., III, "Doctrine of Creation," Part 4 (1961), p. 12.

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palates. Bretscher's case rests on his definition of "the Word of God"; the most common synonym is "Gospel." Since this is so basic for understanding Bretscher, he should be permitted to speak for himself.¹³

We shall unfold the thesis that the authentic meaning of the phrase "the Word of God" is that found in Luther's Catechisms. The Spirit speaks the Word of God's grace to our hearts out of the cross of Christ. By means of that Word He works the miracle of faith. The closest synonym for "the Word of God" is "the Gospel" in all its senses, including also the antithetical "Law."

Bretscher sets up what amounts to an algebraic formula to demonstrate the validity of his theological proposition: "the Word of God" = "Gospel" = proclamation about God's grace, centering in the Cross but also involving Law, Law at least in some sense. "Gospel" and "Word of God" are basically interchangeable for Bretscher. Here the concept of "the Word of God" does not mean or necessarily require a type of historical report of what happened, but a direct action of God in the hearts of people. This may be called a dynamic concept of "the Word of God." Bretscher like Karl Barth has given new meanings to traditional terms and this complexity can only lead to incurable confusion unless each of the terms is defined. Whenever the reader understands "the Word of God" in any other sense, e.g., the Bible, he cannot but fail to understand Bretscher. Bretscher is quite clear in stating that his purpose is to present a theology different from the traditional one. He takes issue with the older Missouri Synod teachers and even lays their "sin" on the back of the seventeenth century theologians.¹⁴

In understanding any theological system, it is important to determine where that system begins. Bretscher begins his system by determining the meaning of "the Word of God" in the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther.¹⁵ No one can doubt that such components as "the Word of God" and Luther's two Catechisms are the stuff out of which orthodoxy is made – but heterodoxy can be made out of the same stuff, if only arranged differently. Bretscher is guilty of two errors from a Lutheran perspective.

First, Lutheran theology does not begin with the Lutheran Confessions, as Bretscher does in using the two catechisms of Luther, in establishing a foundation for itself. (This is not to deny that it begins with the Small Catechism as a teaching device.) It begins with the Scriptures and tests its results against the Lutheran Confessions to which Luther's Catechisms belong. Bretscher takes the concept identified as "the Word of God" and to determine a meaning does something that resembles a word-

¹³ After the Purifying, p. 18.

¹⁴ While Bretscher provides new definitions for old terms, he indicates throughout After the Purifying that he is breaking with what he calls "Missouri's Tradition." Cf. pp. 14f. "In the Synod's tradition and piety, Scripture is the Word of God according to a meaning derived from the doctrine of inspiration and certified by Missouri's understanding of the sentence fragment, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim. 3: 16). Thus the term 'the Word of God' stands for the inspired canon of sixty-six books." This position, which Bretscher disparages, can be traced back to seventeenth century Lutheran Orthodoxy. Cf. p. 93, footnote 1. "It is helpful to be aware that the dross with which we are currently wrestling is no distinctively Missouri Synod fallacy, but came into our heritage from much earlier sources." A letter from Bretscher to Laymen's Analysis, dated January 19, 1976, stated the problem can be traced to the medieval heritage of the church.

¹⁵ After the Purifying, pp. 12f., 18.

study in these two of our Confessions. There are eleven Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and Bretscher could be asked why he limited himself to only two. Bretscher's method is a kind of confessional proof-texting. His study is supposed to demonstrate that the phrases "His word," "that Word," "the words," "these words," etc. are to be understood according to his own sense, i.e., Gospel, a dynamic Word. Negatively, Bretscher wants to show that the phrase "the Word of God" and similar phrases are not just equivalent to the Bible. "It is clear from the Catechisms that in Luther's mind 'the Word of God' is not simply equivalent to the Bible."16 At least ten years ago Dr. Herbert Bouman, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis did show that in the Lutheran Confessions the phrase "the Word of God" and Scriptures can be and are used as equivalents. This is not to deny that the phrase "the Word of God" may be used of Gospel, but the phrase is definitely used of the Bible. This is substantiated by Holsten Fagerberg, "Regardless of how many other definitions can be and indeed have been applied to the expression 'God's Word,' its relationship to the Bible must be considered of fundamental significance to the Reformation theology."17 Even in the catechisms cited by Bretscher to demonstrate his interpretation, the phrase "the Word of God" can refer to a Bible passage authoritatively spoken by God. Take, for example, Luther's explanation of Baptism in the Small Catechism. 18 We are told that, "Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word." Then comes the question "Which is that word of God?" The answer is in the form of a Bible passage. "Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Matthew: Go ye therefore and make disciples out of all nations, ..."

Those who will study the Lutheran confessions for themselves will see that these confessions, especially in discussing the question of authority, do equate the Word of God with the Bible; because the Bible is recognized as the Word of God, it is the source of Christian doctrine. This fact, of course, is explicitly denied by Bretscher. Yes, for him the Bible has authority, but the Bible's authority derives from the fact that it possesses the Gospel. The point here, however, is that Bretscher clearly has a faulty or at least a truncated concept of how the phrase "the Word of God" is used in the Lutheran Confessions. What is positively disastrous is that he is teaching his erroneous concept to the teachers of our children in the parochial school. This is hardly an insignificant matter.

What is even more regrettable is the starting-place for Bretscher's theology. It has been mentioned above. It is not Lutheran to begin with the Lutheran Confessions. It is Lutheran to begin with the Bible and to confirm and test our findings with the Lutheran Confessions. Simply to begin with the Lutheran Confessions without explaining their relationship to the Scriptures as the Word of God is to elevate the Lutheran Confessions to that position of honor only held by the Scriptures. In addition, it is against the rules of sound logic to take a phrase, any phrase, and run it

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁷ A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537, translated by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), p. 17.

^{18 &}quot;Small Catechism," Concordia Triglot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 551.

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through any number of documents to determine one meaning by which all other uses of the phrase must be understood. Even in the Old and New Testaments, the phrase "the Word," "the Word of God," "the Word of the Lord," etc. can have a variety of meanings. The meaning of each is to be determined by the context in which it is found. It is illogical to transpose the meaning of one use of the phrase upon another. But this is what Bretscher has done! He is wrong in asserting that there is only one meaning for the phrase.¹⁹ After he has determined what he thinks is the meaning of "the Word of God" in the Catechisms of Luther he applies it to the constitution of the Missouri Synod. Such an illogical procedure will produce only more confusion.

Bretscher is opposed to any concept which suggests that the Scripture "as the written Word of God" is the source of Christian doctrine. But this is the very position of the Missouri Synod constitution as cited by Bretscher himself.²⁰

For example, Article II of the Synod's Constitution declares that the Synod and every member "accepts without reservation" the Scriptures "as the written Word of God." But what do the members of the Synod have in mind when they hear and use that phrase, "the Word of God"? To many, perhaps most, it means the inspired and inerrant Scriptures, with God as the true Author of every word. To a minority, however, "the Word of God" means the proclamation of grace in Christ to sinners, and the Scriptures as the fountain and norm of that Word. To submit to Scripture as "the Word of God" by the "Gospel" meaning of that phrase is quite different from submitting to Scripture's authority by way of the doctrine of inspiration.

By a slight omission of the word "written," Bretscher has in fact changed the letter and the spirit of the Synod's Constitution. What is important is what the constitution's writers had in mind – not the readers! The constitution calls the Scriptures "the written Word of God" (emphasis added). In the remainder of the discussion Bretscher simply uses the phrase "the Word of God" and proposes that his definition of "the Word of God," as a type of "Gospel" proclamation of the forgiveness of sins is tenable within the boundaries of the constitution. Bretscher's concept of "the Word of God" is only possible because he dropped the word "written" from the remainder of his discussion. The clear fact is that the inspired and inerrant written Word of God as the source of doctrine is the very position of the Synod's Constitution. Dishonesty might be too strong a word to label this sleight of hand. But what kind of theological discussion is possible where the apparent and evident meaning of a phrase is deliberately altered by dropping out one word in order to achieve just the opposite effect?

The position which Bretscher attributes to what he considers the majority in the Missouri Synod is in fact the position not only of the Synod's Constitution, but also of the Lutheran Confessions. His word-study approach to the phrase "the Word of God" began with a false methodology and his conclusions are not valid. Let one citation

¹⁹ After the Purifying, p. 77. The letter of January 19, 1976, defends this view. cf. Note 13. 20 Ibid., pp. 15f.

from the "Preface to the Christian Book of Concord" show that the phrase "Word of God" when used in the context of authority refers to the Bible. Where the Latin refers to "the Word of God," the German refers to the Scriptures. Let the reader himself compare the English translation of the Latin in the *Concordia Triglot*²¹ with the English translation of the German in the Tappert edition.²²

... it has always been our purpose that in our lands, dominions, schools, and churches no other doctrine be proclaimed and accurately set forth than that which is founded upon the Word of God (quae verbo Dei fundamenta).

...our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God... (die, so in derheiligen gottlichen Schrift gegrundet...).

Bretscher's major contention that "the Word of God," understood as the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, is the source of doctrine is simply not that of the Lutheran Confessions. The phrase "the Word of God" in the Lutheran Confessions may have other meanings for other uses, but when it is used as referring to the source of doctrine it refers to the Bible.

Bretscher's propositions to the church in his *After the Purifying* are not simply the offering of a new theological perspective, but the presentation of an entirely new theology and doctrine. His system is at variance with what has been recognized as the traditional Missouri Synod position, as he admits several times throughout his book.²³ He can hardly be faulted simply because he has proposed to go against the traditional understanding. What is necessary is that his position must be carefully delineated to show that it is incompatible not only with our church's position but with the Lutheran Confessions and especially the Bible. It has already been shown that Bretscher does not begin theology with the Scriptures themselves but with two of the Lutheran Confessions. In addition, it has been shown his understanding of how the phrase "the Word of God" is used in the Lutheran Confessions and the Constitution of the Synod is faulty.

Bretscher sees the "the Word of God," defined as the preached Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and the Scriptures as both having a function in determining what the church should believe. Bretscher does not do away with the Scriptures, but he puts them in a position subservient to Gospel or what he calls "the Word of God."

²¹ Concordia Triglot, op. cit., p. 21.

²² The Book of Concord translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 12.

²³ Bretscher quite openly discusses those who accepted his position long ago that the Word of God is the Gospel and who attempted to cover it up by reasserting the older belief that the Bible was the Word of God, p. 100. Consider, for example, those whose tilt was toward the primacy of the Gospel as the Word of God. On the one hand they spoke much of the Gospel, often very beautifully. On the other hand they continued to reassure their anxious brethren of their unqualified acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God. "Nothing has changed," they seemed to say, as they repeated in familiar words their full acceptance of the plenary inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Scriptures. But their brethren were not reassured. They saw compromise and dishonesty. They knew very well that something had changed. Critical study of the Bible would be impossible without some change of attitude toward the authority of the Scriptures.

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Any authority possessed by the Scripture as "the Word of God" does not come because they are given by God, but comes because they serve the Gospel. This is a point which Bretscher never tires of repeating. One citation will do however. "Scripture is properly called the Word of God, then, for the sake of the Gospel of truth and life in Christ which is its glory."²⁴

For Bretscher, the Bible's authority does not depend on where it comes from, but rather on what it does. It is impossible for him to assert that the Bible is the written Word of God as a self-contained, autonomous, self-sufficient, and objective fact. For Bretscher, objective religious truth just might not be possible. The Bible may be called "the Word of God" when the Bible serves the purpose of bringing the Gospel, i.e. "the Word of God" as the proclamation of forgiveness. Outside of this preaching action, it should not be called "the Word of God." In several places, Bretscher scores heavily the concept that the Bible is the written word of God.

Our [Missouri Synod's] concept of plenary divine authorship immediately reduces the Gospel to only a "part" of the Bible. The Bible is now larger than the Gospel. The Word of God is not only the Gospel and its articles, but also the rest of the Bible.²⁵

For the dross [Bretscher's negative term for what must be rooted out of the church] thinks that the Bible's inspiration means its divine authorship.²⁶

Bretscher also takes issue with three prominent theologians of the Missouri Synod, Walther, Pieper, and Bente, each of whom recognized Scriptures as the written Word of God and hence also the source of Christian doctrine.²⁷

Lutheran theology has spoken of the Bible as *norma normans* and its confessions as the *norma normata*. By these terms it was meant that the Bible alone was the originating source of all doctrine and that the Lutheran Confessions derived their authority from the Bible because they correctly reflected the Biblical teaching. Applying this same model to Bretscher, the Gospel or "the Word of God" as he defines it becomes the *norma normans*, the originating source of all doctrine, and the Scriptures become the *norma normata*, i.e., a secondary authority *quatenus*, only in so far as they reflect the Gospel.²⁸ It is only if and when the Scriptures become activated by "the Word of God" that, in Bretscher's scheme, they become "the Word of God," except maybe in a potential sense.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 75. It would not be an unsafe opinion to assert that Bretscher wrote After the Purifying to destroy as unbiblical, unconfessional, and hence also unchristian or least sub-christian any objective understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.

²⁸ Controversy over the proper relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions has centered around two Latin words, *quia*, "because," and quatenus, "in so far as." Most Lutheran churches in their formal vows use the quia formula, i.e., they accept the confessions because they agree with the Holy Scriptures. Using the *quia-quatenus* formula, Bretscher could not even say that he accepts the Bible as the Word of God because it agrees with the Gospel, the primary Word of God. In some places of the Bible, Bretscher admits that there might be no Word of God. Therefore, he would have to accept a quatenus understanding. The Bible is the Word of God in so far as it agrees with the Gospel.

Perhaps the best way to put it is that, for Bretscher, "the Word of God" is something that happens to or with the Scriptures. Given the circumstances that the Bible is used to preach forgiveness, it becomes "the Word of God." In other words, preaching forgiveness can also become authoritative "Word of God." Basically, this is the same position held and put forth by Karl Barth. I found no place where Bretscher cites or credits Barth for his views. Whether Bretscher arrived at the Barthian position on his own or by following Barth explicitly matters not. Bretscher and Barth have virtually identical positions on the Bible.

In the positions of both Barth and Bretscher the terms and concepts of "vertical" and "horizontal" play significant roles.²⁹ The term "vertical" applies to God's action in "the Word of God." The term "horizontal" refers to human history, of which the Bible is a part. Bretscher calls the vertical the theological reality and the horizontal the historical reality. The moment of truth for Bretscher and Barth is when the vertical line from heaven intercepts the horizontal line of human history. Bretscher does an adequate job in explaining himself.

The two lines intersect. The vertical cuts through the horizontal, both within the Scriptures and within ourselves, whenever and wherever the Word of God is spoken and heard by human beings. At the point of intersecting, the "sparks" of the Spirit's power fly, as it were. We experience that power wherever that Word of the Gospel, through preaching, teaching, sacrament, or the Scriptures themselves, bursts into Spirit and life for us.³⁰

As Barth, so also Bretscher does not distinguish the Spirit's action in the production of the Bible from His action in bringing Christians to faith. To use Barth's terminology there is no qualitative difference in the "encounter" experienced by the writers in penning the Scriptures and the "encounter" experienced by those who accept the Gospel today. There might be a quantitative time difference but no qualitative difference between the type of action the writers of the Scriptures experienced and ours today. Lest the reader think that Bretscher's position is being misrepresented, he says quite clearly, "Our personal historicity is not different in kind from the historicity of our forefathers who wrote the Bible, who heard and read its message in each original setting and occasion, or about whom the Scriptures speak."31 Yes, the history recorded in the Scriptures belongs to world history just as any other history does. It is not super-history or a spiritualized history. But, in the history recorded in the Bible, God was acting in a special way. Theologians have called the history recorded in the Bible "salvation history," Heilsgeschichte, because God was working there to bring about the salvation of mankind. God's action in all of history is called providence. His action in relation to Israel, Jesus, and the apostles belonged to "salvation history" and was not just part of providence. Since Bretscher fails to distinguish qualitatively between world history in general and "salvation history," the intersecting of vertical and horizontal

²⁹ Cf. the diagram, After the Purifying, p. 72.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

³¹ Ibid.

lines can happen today just as it happened back in the Biblical days. Because of this failure to distinguish between salvation history and providence in general, Bretscher has, in effect, confused conversion with revelation in the same style as Barth has. Let it be said clearly that the Christian's conversion is not cut from the same cloth as the revelations made to the prophets and apostles.

In Bretscher's system, the one fixed item is "the Word of God" understood as the Gospel of the preached forgiveness of sins. This "word of God" is not historically bound to any one time but may invade time at any point. Though "the Word of God," the theological reality as Bretscher calls it, is a type of fixed reality, the historical reality is not capable of being known in any kind of certain or fixed way. In Bretscher's system, "the Word of God" belongs to the theological reality, the vertical line, and the Bible belongs to the historical reality, the horizontal line. What belongs to the historical plane, the horizontal line, can be questioned and doubted. What belongs to this horizontal dimension can never be known for certain. Let Bretscher speak for himself. "We set them free under God to think for themselves, to test everything, and to embrace what seems convincing. We teach them also to hold in abeyance, modify, or even reject whatever does not seem persuasive." Bretscher not only permits but commends the value of methods that put question marks over what belongs to historical reality in the Bible.

On the contrary, Lutheran education will recognize that the revolution in Biblical studies is a gift from God to be accepted without fear and used to His glory... We cannot explore the findings of that revolution at this time. Certain areas in which contemporary Biblical studies have seemed to pose so great a threat are well known in our Synod. They have to do with the authorship of the Biblical books, with the formation of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament and of the Gospels in the New, with the use the New Testament makes of Old Testament texts, with the understanding of literary forms, with the historicity and facticity of persons and events, with the authenticity of Jesus' own utterances in relation to the voices of witnesses who breathed His Spirit and spoke in His name, and with the interchangeable identification between Jesus and His church.³³

I have deliberately added emphases in the passage quoted from Bretscher so that the reader may clearly see what belongs to the horizontal line, the historical reality, and thus may be open to question. Not only does Bretscher want to call into question the authorship of certain books of the Bible; he wants to recognize as a gift from God a method that doubts and questions "historicity and facticity of persons and events." Nowhere does Bretscher make any attempt to demonstrate the validity of the methods which he calls "a gift from God," but his "gift from God" can be used to doubt the historicity of every event and person recorded in the Bible.³⁴ Bretscher at

³² Ibid., p. 88.

³³ Ibid., p. 87. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Bretscher does not deny the existence of history behind the Gospel but affirms it. "Their (the apostles') proclamation does not create history. On the contrary, the history through the Spirit generates its proclamation." But if history

that point has gone beyond Karl Barth who tried to avoid the question of whether or not there was history behind the "Word"; Bretscher has adopted the position of the radical German Lutheran Rudolph Bultmann. Ideologically there is no basic difference between Bretscher and Bultmann. Both believe in a kind of "Word of God" which is existentially believed, even though every historical event or person in the Bible is open to doubt or even denial. Bretscher, like Bultmann, holds that a theologian can believe the theological reality while at the same time questioning the history.

Thus, the Christian exegete is two things simultaneously. In terms of the Bible's "theological reality" he is a hungry child of God, eager to hear the Word of God and feed on it as his Bread of Life. In terms of the "historical reality" of Scripture, he is a disciplined historian, facing all the hardships and hazards of the historical enterprise, but not afraid to use his mind.³⁵

The question must be posed to Bretscher whether in certain cases a person reading the Bible from the vantage of historical reality can completely see the theological reality. Bretscher seems to say yes and no to this question. First, the positive, "What we call the 'theological reality' of Scripture is actually experienced by anyone who reads his Bible with a heart that asks, seeks, and knocks according to Christ's promise." Then, the negative, "Sometimes the Word of God is buried so deeply beneath the surface of the Scriptures that it is hardly worth the effort to mine it. The possibility of discovering riches in unexpected places must never be foreclosed, of course./" But the possibility of discovering the Word of God in a certain section of the Bible also implies the possibility of not finding it in that section. It must also be implied that someone might never find the Word of God in the Bible. Never does Bretscher point to a section in the Bible and say that he is absolutely certain that it is the Word of God. He would not a priori rule out the possibility that it could become the Word of God, but he does not state categorically that a section is the Word of God. According to Bretscher's system, such categorical statements about the Bible are impossible.

Since no history is immune to being dissolved by the so-called historical-critical methods, Bretscher's concept of "the Word of God," the Gospel, i.e. a proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, hangs on one glorious skyhook. Yes, Bretscher speaks about "the Word of God" as the proclamation of forgiveness for Christ's sake. But where would Bretscher be if some self-proclaimed historian announced that there was no Jesus and, if there were a Jesus, He did not die or rise from the dead. Actually, Bretscher's system needs no history. If Bretscher's system were adopted by Lutheran parochial school teachers and made operative in our Lutheran schools – this is the book's goal – we would have to expect the cessation of the teaching of Christianity as an historic religion about

can be doubted, on what does the Gospel build? Is Bretscher opting for the theology of hope or mysticism when he says that "the history through the Spirit generates its proclamation"? *Ibid.*, p. 29. Cf. p. 91 where Bretscher speaks of exegetes changing their minds on historical questions.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 92f.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

historic persons and events, Moses, Abraham, David, Jesus, Peter, Paul, *ad infinitum*. It is hoped that the members of the Lutheran Education Association who published and distributed *After the Purifying* will alert its members to the totally devastating nature of Bretscher's approach.

In comparison with Bretscher's historical agnosticism, his other points seem pale in comparison. Here are just a few of them, some of which might have been briefly touched upon before. Bretscher is not correct in asserting that the Confessions do not distinguish between the various uses of the phrase "Word of God." They do distinguish the various meanings of the phrase, and by looking at the section each reader can see the differences for himself.³⁸ Secondly, he claims that his Gospel concept is the Rock³⁹ referred to in the Bible. If this is a reference to the rock on which the man built his house, in that case that rock is all that Jesus said, which the believer totally accepts. If Bretscher is referring to certain Old Testament passages, the Rock is God. I have found no place in the Bible where Bretscher's understanding of Rock as Gospel can be supported. Thirdly, Bretscher can never have historical certainty about what Jesus really said. Fourth, Bretscher gives an inappropriate honor to the Lutheran Confessions when he says that they control our understanding of the Scripture.40 The Lutheran principle is "Scripture interprets Scripture." Even without the Confessions, we should be able to understand Scripture's true meaning. Luther discovered Paul's doctrine of iustification before the Confessions were written. Fifth, with Bretscher's system, it would be impossible for the Bible ever to hold an unbeliever accountable, since only when the Spirit works a miracle in our hearts do we recognize "the Word of God."41 Karl Barth had the same problem on this point. Sixth, a number of Bretscher's assertions about Jesus are inaccurate. Was Jesus' ancestry mixed because He was Galilean?42 If he were Galilean by ancestry, why did the enrollment of Joseph and Mary take place in Bethlehem? Seventh, Bretscher makes light of authenticating signs.⁴³ This attitude is basic to anyone who diminishes the absoluteness of past historical happenings. Bretscher points to Jesus' refusal to perform signs on one occasion (Matthew 16:4). We refer to John 20:30-31, where the evangelist states that it is through signs that a person comes to faith. If this Gospel is too late for some, then how about Jesus' reference to signs as an answer to John the Baptist's question about the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6)? Bretscher's system would put a big question mark over every sign that Jesus did. Bretscher is not right in saying that the "cross is the sign of Jonah." 44 It was Jonah's deliverance from the fish after being swallowed.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 35

⁴² Ibid., p. 54.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 56

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

The rabbis and Jesus are agreed on that one. Bretscher is also wrong in asserting that the people believed John or Jesus just because they heard their messages.⁴⁵ Both authenticated themselves as prophets to the people before their messages were accepted.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65. In handling the Biblical data, Bretscher shows a decisive prejudice in favor of his own position. He cannot tolerate the idea that before a message is accepted by the hearer, there must be some type of certification of the message-bringer. Thus, throughout *After the Purifying* he wants to demonstrate that first the Gospel or the Word of God is believed and then afterwards there follows some type of acceptance of the Bible. So, in handling the persons of John the Baptist and Jesus, he asserts that their messages were accepted before the hearers asked the question of what their authority was. Bretscher has reversed the process. First, the people were convinced that John was a prophet, then they accepted his message of repentance. It was the same with Jesus. Exodus 3 shows that Moses' big concern was whether people would accept his authority. For this reason, God gave him signs. In commissioning the Twelve Apostles, Jesus first gives them signs to authenticate their office (Matthew 10:1).



FORMULA OF CONCORD ARTICLE VI: THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW

(April 1978)

Formula of Concord Article VI: The Third Use of the Law

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THE sixth article of the Formula of Concord discusses the question of the validity of L the Law and its use in the life of the Christian. The historic cause for this issue was the assertion by some Lutherans that, as Christians, they had been rescued from the Law's accusation and they thus were free of all its claims and directives in the conduct of their lives. Freed from the Law, Christians could lead their lives according to the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. Martin Luther had faced successfully the problem with his student George Agricola, but the problem re-emerged after his death among other theologians and pastors. Theologically the issue of the Law in the life of the Christian, which is commonly called the Third Use of the Law, has two parts. First, the question of what validity the Law has for the Christian must be answered. Secondly, if the Law does have validity in the Christian's life, the question remains: In which portion of the Christian's life is the Law valid? Other questions besides the nature and use of the Law in the life of the Christian are intimately connected with this issue. The Lutheran doctrines of the Holy Spirit, the nature and function of the Holy Scriptures, and the nature of man are all encompassed in the question of The Third Use of the Law. The best introduction to the problem would be a brief sketch of how Lutheranism sees the Law functioning among men.

I.

Traditional Lutheran theology discusses the uses or functions of the Law in the present milieu of sin under three distinct categories: curb, mirror, and rule, (FC SD, I). The subject of the sixth article of the Formula is the Law's third function or use, whereby it serves as a rule, norm, or guide in the Christian's life. Another term for this function of the Law is the *didactic* use since the Law's instructional or teaching value is emphasized. The word *informative* would be an adequate substitute for *didactic* since the Law does not so much motivate behavior as it instructs and informs what Christian behavior should be. The first two functions of the Law as a curb and mirror are respectively covered in the Formula's Article IV, "Good Works," and Article V, "Law and Gospel."

According to the Law's first function as a curb, it is directed toward unregenerate man as he is an unbeliever and as he rejects God's will in his life. Without any outside restrictions, man in the state of sin and estrangement from God would devour his neighbor and wreak havoc and destruction in the world. Men would organize themselves into marauding hordes of destructive creatures and would eventually destroy themselves. The Law is instituted according to its first use to hinder men from gross acts of evil and to induce them to perform externally good works. The concept

of the unregenerate performing these kinds of externally acceptable good works is discussed in Article IV, "Good Works." Philip Melanchthon had already set down the Lutheran position on this issue in Augsburg Confession XVI, "Civil Government." The first use of the Law may also be called the civil use of the Law, since the government promulgates the Law and executes it. The government publishes the Law and then through threats of punishments and promises of rewards makes sure that the Law is carried out. Against the backdrop of Luther's concept of the kingdoms of God's left and right hand, the Law here is a manifestation of God's left hand. Lutherans have prized very highly this understanding of Law, because without civil tranquility the church would function only under the most severe hardships.

The Law can function through the state upon man only because man in his creation is oriented toward God and thus is a religious being. Thus, His understanding of the Law flows naturally from his creation. He is born with a sense of moral right and wrong, even though in sin these categories never fit the divine standards perfectly. As the state judges man's external acts, his conscience serves as an internal judge against each infraction of the Law in his heart, though the Law is imperfectly stated. The Law in this first function has meaning only in this world's existence and does not benefit man in his relationship to God in the matter of salvation. Even if a man were able to live perfectly according to this world's standards, he would nevertheless be entirely without hope of salvation in the next world.

The second purpose of the Law is to serve as a mirror in reflecting man's sin to himself. According to God's original creative purpose, the Law served to describe man's natural relationship to God. The Law was the positive relationship between the creature and the Creator. With the entrance of sin into the world, the Law has taken on an accusatory function, not part of God's original purpose for the Law. As long as man remains a sinner or sins adhere to the believer, God through the Law accuses man of sin. Though the accusatory function of the Law was not its primary purpose, the Law's accusations confront each human being since Adam. It is in this sense that Melanchthon in the Apology says that the Law always accuses (Apol. IV, 38). The Law in its accusatory function is recognized as effective when it creates terrors within man's conscience and leads him to despair. Among Lutherans in general there was no quarrel about the civil and accusatory functions of the Law.

A real problem about the use of the Law arose over the question of its validity and use in the life of a Christian. a person who had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and brought to faith. The Lutherans were agreed that Christ had freed man from the accusatory nature of the Law. But some held that Christian freedom from the Law's accusation also meant freedom from the Law's directives in the Christian's life (SD VI, 2). This whole question is not only one of historical interest, but has contemporary significance as the same questions have arisen among Lutherans first in Europe and now in North America (SD VI, 3). Related intimately to the concept of The Third Use of the Law is the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

II.

The historic Lutheran Confessions, including the Formula, contain no specific article dealing with the Holy Spirit. The references in the third articles of the Apostles and Nicene Creeds are clear but too brief to be considered extended theological treatises on the Holy Spirit. The concerns of the ancient creeds center more on His person than work and are simply too limited in length to handle adequately problems later confronting the church.

Perhaps the lack of a specific treatise on the Holy Spirit speaks more eloquently to the Lutheran understanding of the third person of the Trinity. It indicates a Lutheran hesitancy to speak of the Spirit in any isolated or independent sense. The Spirit as He comes from God never operates autonomously but always carries out the Father's will as it has been given to Him from the Son. He brings to completion in the world what the Father has worked through the Son. The Spirit brings to completion the work of creation. Through creation the Law was first given to man. The Spirit is therefore also responsible for man's creation and is the connecting link between God and man. The Spirit is responsible for the perfect harmony in creation, known as the natural Law, and He is responsible for man's created understanding of this Law. Man, created in God's image, was able to reflect upon creation and have constant knowledge of God through this reflection. With this concept of creation, natural law, and the Holy Spirit, the Lutherans had to object to any claim about the presence of the Holy Spirit replacing the need for the Law. This type of argumentation asserted that the Law was unnecessary in any part of a Christian's life. In fact, just the opposite was true. It was the regenerate and not the unregenerate who understood the Law, and could in their inner nature appreciate it (SD VI, 5). The unregenerate needed the Law to prevent gross sins against society and to pry them into performing external good works, but those who had believed in Jesus and thus were regenerated by the Holy Spirit were able to recognize the Law as the Holy Spirit's will for their lives.

The Holy Spirit in His creative action in relation to the world was responsible for the Law. Law as the reflection of God in the world permeated the entire creation and thus all the Spirit's creative actions were within the Law. God does not have one relationship to the creation through the natural Law and another through the Holy Spirit. Failure to recognize the validity of the Law anywhere in creation, including the life of the Christian, indicated a failure to understand the Holy Spirit's person and work. The Spirit cannot work against the natural Law as He would be condemning His own work. This would involve Him in an internal contradiction. Both the creation and the Law, as the natural principles of creation, can be perverted by man to serve his own selfish desires. Nevertheless, the Law as created by God was good simply by virtue of its divine creation.

The Lutheran principle is that the Holy Spirit never works for salvation directly, but through instruments or means taken from creation. In the creation of the world and its preservation the Holy Spirit works through the natural law. The Law, which first expressed itself in creation, was as the creative word of God the first word of God.

The Holy Spirit's fit vehicle of revelation to man was the Law. The Holy Spirit now brings to man the word of salvation through the Gospel, but the directions inherent in nature for man's existence are never replaced or rejected by the Holy Spirit. The natural Law is only replaced when the nature of this creation is replaced by a more glorious one. Those who do not see the Law as valid in the life of the Christian must also assert that this world has passed away and that the new world has already been inaugurated. This proposition must be firmly rejected because only at Christ's coming will this world end and the new one be established.

God's created Law in nature may be less than fully comprehended by man in the state of sin, but that Law is still present curbing man's evil, condemning man's sin, and providing positive direction in the life of the Christian who through Jesus Christ has been given the Holy Spirit, the Author of nature's Law. The restoration of man through the Gospel does not annul the directives of the Law but confirms them and gives to man a true understanding of the Law. The Lutheran understanding of the nature and function of the Holy Scriptures is also intimately connected with the Third Use of the Law.

III.

The Formula, in presenting the Lutheran position on the Third Use of the Law, uses Biblical references which refer to the Scriptures in their totality and not only those passages speaking specifically about the Law. Both Psalm 1 (SD VI, 4) and 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (SD VI, 14) are used to demonstrate the Law's validity in the life of the Christian, though both passages refer to the Scriptures in their totality, not simply to the written Law. Psalm 1 speaks about the man who delights in the Books of Moses and the 2 Timothy 3:15-17 passages speak about the total inspiration of the Scripture and not just the Gospel. Just as Lutherans see the entire Scripture as inspired, so they see the entire Scriptural message, both Law and Gospel, as applicable to the life of the Christian. The Formula sees in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 a direct Biblical command to apply the Law in the life of the Christian (SD VI, 14). Underlying the concept that the Law is made applicable in the life of the Christian through the Scriptures is the Lutheran understanding that the Scriptures in all its parts, both Law and Gospel, are inspired and that these Scriptures are directed to man in the state of sin. The Scriptures are God's written word, necessitated by the fall into sin and directed to man in this fallen condition. Natural Law, sin, and Scriptural inspiration are related to each other.

Man by the fall into sin was no longer capable of properly comprehending the Law as it originally was part of creation. He followed after that Law, but he fulfilled its requirements only inadequately at best and in every case the Law became his accuser. As a religiously created being, man is compelled by his inherent religious nature to search after God, but these searches are doomed to failure (Apol. IV, 22-25, 40). God through His mercy sent the prophets and later the apostles to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ. But before the proclamation of salvation could be made, the Law as first found in nature had to be restated in such a way that man in his perverted state could

fully comprehend what God had always been setting forth in the natural Law. Both the prophets and the apostles redirected the Law specifically against man's unregenerate nature. They came first to proclaim the Law as a mirror of man's sins, i.e., its second use. Though God condemns through the Law, His proclamation of the Law through His prophets and apostles belongs to God's overall plan of mercy since man by the Law is properly prepared for the Gospel. The Spirit's inspiration of the prophets and apostles embraces not only the words of the Gospel but also of the Law. The Formula makes no qualitative difference between the Spirit's origination of the Gospel and that of the Law. Both the Law and the Gospel proceed from the Spirit's inner being. Both are His products.

The person who claims the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit and rejects the Law as revealed in the prophets and the apostles is, in fact, rejecting the Holy Spirit by rejecting His work. Whoever claims a working of the Spirit for his life apart from the prophets and apostles is a fanatic (SD XII, 30). The Holy Spirit has given both the Law and the Gospel and He is responsible for their inscripturation. The Law is valid in the life of the Christian if for no other reason than that it originates with the Spirit and He has caused it to be written in the Holy Scriptures. There are, of course, other reasons for the Law's validity in the life of the Christian. Nevertheless, the Lutherans saw the Law as part and parcel of the special divine revelation. Those who rejected the Law did not only have a faulty concept of the Law itself but of divine revelation and of the Scriptures themselves. Also connected with the concept of the Third Use of the Law was the Lutheran anthropology, the doctrine of man.

IV.

The Formula reflected the Lutheran view of man as living under the Law in four different conditions: the original created state of moral innocence, the fallen state of sin, the state of regeneration, and the final state of resurrection. The Law in its third function is directed to man in the state of regeneration. Seeing man in these four different phases is essential for a fuller understanding of the Lutheran view of the Law and particularly its Third Use. The Lutheran view dismisses the idea that the Law undergoes any change as it is the expression of God's immutable will (FC SD VI, 15). The four different situations are accounted for by man's differing relationships to God and thus also to the Law. Man, as he is a sinner, can only envisage the Law with prohibitions and penalties as a negative intrusion into his life. It is difficult for man to imagine the original state of moral innocence in which he found positive direction for his life in the Law. In this original condition he needed neither prophet nor Scripture since man's communion with God's creation was itself participation in God's revelation. In the sinless condition man viewed nature and God's revelation as one entity. No special revelation beyond nature was needed. Man in moral innocence needed no Law as a curb for the gross manifestations of evil or for a reflection of his own sin. He needed no special direction of the Law as nature provided a constant, regular communication of the Law. Only in the fallen state is the original positive

function of the Law replaced by negative prohibition. Law, understood originally as a description of man's positive relationships to God, to his fellow men, and to his environment becomes with the entrance of sin a negative description of man's broken relationships to God, his fellow men, and his environment. In the first condition, the indicative was merged with the imperative. The Law served as a description of what man was and what he was to do and what he, indeed, could do. There was no tension between what man did and what man could, must, and should do. Now in the state of sin what man must do and should do is not what he can do and does do. The Law becomes a compelling and restraining force against man's rebellious nature. What man once did naturally he is now forced to do against his will. The unregenerate man hates the performance of the Law with an intensity comparable to the first man's love for its performance. The sinner cannot remain morally neutral to the Law. He performs the Law which he hates and he knows that failure to perform its requirements brings penalties. Where he fulfills the Law, he is goaded by the promise of rewards and threats of its punishments. The Law makes the sinner's life miserable (SD VI, 19).

When the sinner becomes a Christian, the Law begins to take on a new, different character for him. His new condition as a Christian means a new relationship with God and His Law. The Law in this Third Use is addressed to the sinner who has become a Christian but still remains in part under the control of sin (SD VI, 9). Understanding the Law in this Third Use is predicated on understanding the Lutheran view of the regenerate Christian.

Essential to Lutheran anthropology is the internal strife within the Christian. He is torn between that part of him which wants to obey God's will and the part that feels more comfortable with the older ways of sin. Though this internal struggle is never over in this life, the promise of victory is assured in the resurrection. Several terms express these two opposing forces within the Christian. The part belonging to God is designated as the inner man, the Spirit's temple, and the regenerated man, the man who has been born again (FC SD VI, 5). The part which resists God is designated as the old Adam, the flesh, and in other Lutheran writings the old man. The Law of God remains one and immutable, but as it approaches the Christian, its positive directions apply to the converted part and its negative prohibitions with the threats of punishments are directed to the unregenerated condition.

The Christian only so far as he is regenerate is free from the threats and curses of the Law (SD VI, 23) and he recognizes this Law as God's will for his life (SD VI, 12). The Formula uses picturesque language in describing the Christian's response to the Law. In this renewed condition he "does everything from a free and merry spirit" (SD VI, 17). Such good works are motivated by the Holy Spirit and flow from faith, but they are all in accordance with the Law, which is also the Spirit's product (SD VI, 12). Works flow from faith as water comes from a spring, but these works flow down channels established by the Law. This positive direction of the Law without prohibition or fear of punishment is what is essentially meant by the Third Use of the Law.

Law as a positive direction in the life of the Christian is both a restatement of

the original paradisaical condition and a preview of the future state of glorification. In Paradise man knew the Law of God perfectly and rejoiced in it. Also, in the final state of glorification man will not need or hear the negative aspects of the Law. So even now the regenerate man hears the Law of God, rejoices in it with his inner being, and performs it without thought of reward. His only motivation is that he wants to please God.

Law understood in this Third Sense as positive direction and guidance in the life of the Christian presupposes the Gospel. In each of its uses the Law is both didactic and imperative. It is not constructed to change man from a sinner to a saint and cannot effect regeneration. The Spirit's working through the Gospel is the cause of regeneration. But the Gospel presupposes the Law. Just as the Law in the life of the Christian presupposes the Gospel. The Gospel is the proclamation that Jesus has fulfilled the Law's demands and suffered its penalties in man's stead. This message alone effects regeneration. The Law is the skeleton on which the life and death of Jesus is sketched out. The skeleton of the Law as it is framed in the Gospel message comes to the sinner having its structures completely filled out by Jesus. The Law's negative demands have been satisfied in Jesus so that its force becomes positive in the life of a person who has faith in Jesus. The Law's unfilled requirements have been fulfilled in Jesus. Christ has divested the Law of its negative requirements and He presents it to Christians as positive direction.

But the Law which comes as positive direction to the regenerate part of the Christian also comes with its negative prohibition to the Old Adam (FC SD VI, 17, 18, 19). Part of the Christian is never converted. He resists believing that God has fulfilled the Law in Jesus Christ. The old man left unchecked would eventually bring man to final ruin and destruction. According to Lutheran theology the unregenerate self must be forced and coerced with threats of the Law. The unregenerate part of a Christian is on the same level as the unconverted who "are driven and coerced into obedience by the threats of the law" (FC SD VI, 19). Not only does he fight against fulfilling God's Law, but when he does finally comply with the divine prohibitions in an external sense, he becomes a hypocrite as he thinks he has fulfilled God's requirements and earned for himself salvation (FC SD VI, 21). To keep the unregenerate part of man under control, the Christian pastor must preach the negative aspects of the Law. Such works coerced by the preaching of the Law to unregenerated man, even if he is a Christian, have no validity before God for salvation. But the Christian, so far as he is regenerate, performs works from faith which are acceptable to God. These conform to the Law and God finds these acceptable. Though such works are always imperfect, they are acceptable to God because they are performed from faith which is centered in Christ Jesus and not from threats of the Law (FC SD VI, 23).

It is the preaching of the Law and not the Gospel which alerts the Christian to the tension within himself. The same Law which is an expression of God's will in the life of the Christian remains a severe condemnation on his unregenerate nature. This tension, a dualism within the Christian, finds its real cause not in the Law but within the Christian himself. The work of the new man committed to Christ is countered by the old man who only gives up the struggle at death. Underlying the Lutheran concept of the old man is the Lutheran doctrine of original sin. The man who is totally unregenerate is brought struggling and kicking to faith. When a new life has been created, he continues to struggle, kick, and fight against God. The old man is not to be handled in a gentle and kindly way and then treated to the good news of salvation, but he is to be forced and threatened by the Law. The Formula puts it strongly (SD VI, 24):

For the Old Adam, like an unmanageable and recalcitrant donkey, is still a part of them and must be coerced into the obedience of Christ, not only with the instruction, admonition, urging and threatening of the law, but frequently also with the club of punishment and miseries, until the flesh of sin is put off entirely and man is completely renewed in the resurrection.

In this life there is no hope for an end to the conflict. The Christian can revert to hypocrisy by believing that he is by himself fulfilling the Law perfectly or he can abandon the Law and become a libertine. But then he is no Christian. The hope for fulfillment in the Christian is not in this life but in the resurrection. Then he will need the preaching of neither the Law nor the Gospel, for he will be in God's presence. In heaven, the Third Use of the Law will be perfectly realized. There Christians "will do His will spontaneously without coercion, unhindered, perfectly, completely, and with sheer joy, and will rejoice therein forever" (FC SD VI, 25). Even in the final condition, it is not the nature of the Law that has changed but rather that man has become totally regenerated.

V.

The Third Use of the Law also reflects the Lutheran concept of the Law as it focuses attention on the Law's true nature. A recognizable mark of Lutheran theology is the tension between the Law and the Gospel. This tension already has been explored. But this tension is limited only to man in this sinful existence, and not in the original and final conditions of sinlessness. The "thou shalt not" of the Ten Commandments did not originally belong to the essence of the Law. The Third Use of the Law in the life of the Christian reveals the Law's true nature as positive directive. The Law's positive aspects are being reinstated, though the process is painfully slow. This understanding of the Law is not a contribution first made by the Formula but was set down by Luther in the Small Catechism which antedates the Augsburg Confession. His explanations of the Ten Commandments fall under the category of the Law's third function. Though brief, they reflect the Reformer's true genius in understanding the Law as positive directive. For Luther, the Gospel does not replace the Law as God's first vehicle of revelation, but permits the Christian to see the Law in its proper perspective. Here are some examples from the first part of his catechism. The prohibition against the vain use of God's name now includes the request to pray. The prohibition against murder also forbids inflicting physical harm and more important requires helping anyone hurt. In two commandments, the first and the sixth, Luther removed the negative

element entirely, but in the other eight he first listed the prohibition required by the commandment and then its positive directive.

Luther was aware that the Christian continues to offend against God and has to hear the prohibitions and verdicts of the Law. He also knew that the Law could have no positive effect unless a person first knew Christ as the Law's fulfiller. This faith which knows Christ and His benefits is called trust. Thus, when Luther provided an explanation to the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," he saw in it an invitation to faith: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." These words which are Luther's first instruction in the Small Catechism merge the Law and the Gospel into that perfect harmony that man will experience in the final restoration.

In the Third Use of the Law the tension between the Law and the Gospel is finally resolved. Only in the condition of sin does the tension remain. As soon as a man accepts Jesus's fulfillment of the Law through faith, the tension begins to dissolve. The Christian grows constantly in the knowledge of God's positive requirements for his life, but the Old Man never surrenders. The plagues of conscience are never removed, but grow stronger. But as his knowledge of his own sin grows, he also grows in his reliance on Christ.

The Formula states in concluding this article that in glory man will need neither Law nor Gospel. In total glorification he will need neither the threats of the Law nor its directives. He will be thoroughly renewed within himself so that he will from his heart obey God (FC SD VI, 25, 26).



SANCTIFICATION IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

(July 1989)

Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions

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CEVERAL years back, an essay entitled "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology" Dappeared in an issue of the Concordia Theological Quarterly published in honor of the ten years of the seminary presidency of Dr. Robert D. Preus. At first the article received the lack of attention it rightly deserved. During the past academic year, the article was recommended reading for homiletics by two colleagues, one of whom very kindly remarked that the view on sanctification did not revert to moralism. Moralism should not be confused with morality, though the meanings of both concepts are related. Moralism might be defined as living one's life according to certain directives, most of which seem to be negative prohibitions. Another definition might be making morality a goal in itself. Right or proper behavior becomes the end or goal of the philosophical or religious system. It might be presumptuous to say that only the Lutheran position on sanctification, when properly stated, is the only one among the major western religions which offers a doctrine of sanctification which is not intrinsically moralistic. Each failure in understanding sanctification so that it becomes moralism sees sanctification or the Christian life in almost autonomous terms, independent of justification both in regard to content and time. When justification, the doctrine that God saves the sinner freely through Jesus Christ, becomes an item which is now seen through the rear-view mirror as something which has happened and sanctification or the Christian life is seen as something which is viewed through the windshield as a current or future action, sanctification is bound to deteriorate into moralism.

Luther at times hardly appears to be the sanctified saint, at least not in a refined sense which some would like. His off-the-cuff remarks in his Table Talks are not infrequently outrageous. But if anyone feels like this, then the problem is not with the Reformer, but with his or her own views of sanctification, which here in America have been contaminated through exposure to the virus of Reformed and Arminian thought. Protestantism — and here reference is to Reformed and Arminian — unlike Lutheran theology does not see Christology and, with it, justification as not only the center but the substance and goal of theology. Protestantism sees sanctification or Christian living, if not as central, then as least as the goal of theology. Melvin E. Dieter, provost of Asbury Theological Seminary, said of Wesley that he "declared that the supreme and overruling purpose of God's plan of salvation is to renew men's and women's hearts in his own image." For the Reformed the Arminian scheme is reversed so that the goal of theology is no longer the perfection of man but the glorification of God. Sanctification becomes the means through which the goal is reached. Anthony A. Hoekema, professor

¹ CTQ, IL, 1 (April-July 1985), pp. 181-197.

² Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," Five Views on Sanctification (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 15.

emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary, has said, "The final goal of sanctification can be nothing other than the glory of God." Defining sanctification apart from Christology as goal and content will inevitably lead to a moralizing understanding of justification. As soon as sanctification becomes either the goal or the means to attain the goal, it can be qualitatively or quantitatively measured. This can be nothing other than the reintroduction of the doctrine of works which the Lutheran Confessions found so objectionable in their Roman Catholic opponents from the very beginning.

Not only is Christology the center of the Lutheran theology, but it permeates the substance of the other doctrines. Doctrines should not be regarded as separate entities brought together to construct a whole, but perspectives on Christ's person and work (i.e., Christology). Justification, the chief article of Lutheranism, is only an extension of Christology into the life of the believer in regards to the certainty of salvation. God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake. In turn sanctification is an extension first of justification and then Christology.

The concept of justification by grace through faith without works could only be viewed as antinomian or at least leading to it by the Roman Catholics. When the Augsburg Confession says in Article XX, "Our teachers have been falsely accused of forbidding good works," it is responding to the Roman Catholic charge that Lutherans were against good works. The Lutherans countered this charge by saying that instruction in the Ten Commandments has been reinstated in those churches where previously under the Roman Catholics good works were not taught. Thus, it must be made clear that Lutherans teach and require good works, but not as the means to salvation, as in the Roman system, or as the goal of theology as in Protestant thought.

Also essential to the Lutheran concept of good works was that they were performed in society and did not necessarily have a particular religious hue about them. Condemned as "childish and useless works [are] . . . the rosaries, the cult of the saints, monasticism, pilgrimages, appointed fasts, holy days [and] brotherhoods." Tappert in the footnote speaks of brotherhoods as "societies of laymen for the devotional exercises and good works."4 Here the Lutheran perspective on sanctification or good works is startling both in regard to past medieval practice but also as continuous critique on the aberrations arising later. First of all, good works were part of one's entire life and not something which belonged to that part of life which could be viewed as religious. Secondly, it is absurd to speak of one person or group as specializing in good works. This is not to say that religious and secular societies cannot be organized for the purpose of the furtherance of the Gospel and the good of society; however, works performed under such organized situations do not indicate that the participants are intrinsically superior to those who do not belong. Good works naturally flow from the preaching of Christ, which is by definition the preaching of the Gospel of justification, and thus they also belong to the totality of the Christian life and not to some compartment of life.

³ Five Views on Sanctification, op. cit., p. 88.

⁴ The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 41.

Because the culture and religion of our nation has been shaped by the reformations in the Swiss cities of Zurich and Geneva, Lutherans in America have always stood under the threat of being swallowed by a Protestant understanding of sanctification. These reformations under Zwingli and Calvin were so committed to making good works, as least as they understood them, a part of society, that they placed the government under the moral direction of the church, not unlike the style of the Republican presidential aspirant, Pat Robertson. The institutions of society and the government were placed under the rule of Jesus Christ. Whether they succeeded in stamping out sin and encouraging good works is a debatable question, but they made sure that all the poor Christians living under their supervision were totally miserable. This dismal religious philosophy which attempted to control the mind and body was transported first to England and Scotland and then to the United States by the Puritans. A more joyous form of automated good works came with the followers of Wesley, but the end result was the same. Christianity was reduced to things permissible and illegitimate. A similar movement caught hold in Lutheranism with the Pietists, but mercifully became extinct during the Age of Rationalism. The Calvinists saw sanctification as proper outward behavior as so essential that discipline became one of the marks of the true Church. The German Lutheran Pietists along with their English counterparts, the Methodists, had their books of discipline. The first Lutherans in our country bore the stamp of Pietism and then later Rationalism. Though an identification between Pietism and Rationalism should not be made, because the former was committed to a belief in a personal God and the possibility of the miraculous in a way that the latter could never be, both movements saw good works as the goal of life. Pietism does this in ecclesial terms and Rationalism in secular terms. The heritage of Calvin, prospering in the Christian reconstruction movement in the United States, sees as its goal the Christianization of American government and society.

The Lutheran concentration on Christology and justification is often seen as failing to give full attention to the topic of good works and sanctification. Lutherans do not have or as least should not have books describing in detail what are and are not good works. Though we recognize that certain professions are inherently sinful (e.g., an abortionist), we do not say that certain occupations are more Christian than others. A person performing an ordinary occupation for a religious organization is not any more sanctified than one doing the same work for a secular corporation. The phrase "Christian work" should not be applied to those working for Christian organizations, unless they are engaged in the preaching of the Gospel and should, to avoid confusion, be eliminated from our vocabulary. Even when we speak about the holy ministry, we are careful to say that this does not involve the personal sanctification of the clergy. The position of the Augsburg Confession, that the sacraments are not dependent on the faith of the preachers, is in sharp contrast to the one offered nearly three centuries later by Schleiermacher which made the faith of the preacher a factor in the efficacy of

⁵ Augsburg Confession VIII, 2. "Both the sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ even if they are administered by evil men."

the sermon. The ministry is holy not because of the good works or the sanctification of the preacher, but rather because through this office Christ is preached and His sacraments administered. The Lutheran concept of good works requires involvement in the world by working for the improvement of society and its protection from evil. The Augsburg Confession claims that the Emperor Charles V in waging war against the Turks is following the example of the good works of King David.⁶ But Lutherans do not see the maintenance of society as part of God's sanctifying activity. As long as we have a serious doctrine of original sin, we will not even begin to reform the sinner completely. In fact, reforming the sinner as a goal is hardly Lutheran. Somehow the words of Amazing Grace, "I once was lost, but now I'm found," still sound strange to Lutheran ears. (I might add here that the older Reformed theologians follow Calvin in denying that the sinful part of man is really ever eliminated, though modern ones like Hoekema believe that the sinful self is really eliminated once and for all.7) The goal in Lutheran theology is to preach the Gospel of Christ and that preaching will by itself reform the sinner, but never completely. The sinner is not first justified by the preaching of Christ and then sanctified subsequently by some sort of admonitions to do good works. No, not at all! The preaching of the Gospel in the moment that it is preached justifies the sinners and makes him abound in good works. Since the believing Christian is never completely a believer, but is filled with doubts and the downright unbelief of the Old Adam who lives within him as an unwelcome and uninvited guest, the Christian in so far as he is still unbeliever engages in works which must be labeled as clearly sinful for which he must face the consequences in this world. To make matters even more complex, some of the good works which Christians perform from a good motive can also as the same time be done grudgingly from a bad motive. The Christian finds himself caught in a dilemma. He knows that as a sinner he needs the threats of law to curb his base appetites and that, when he oversteps these boundaries, he must pay the consequences. He not only knows but he wants to engage in good works which flow naturally from his faith in Christ and from Christ dwelling in him. Now here comes the dilemma: the one outward good work comes from both good and bad motives, simply because he is both saint and sinner. The antithesis between the law and the Gospel is existentially experienced within the Christian in the struggle between the Old Adam and the new man. This problem is addressed in the Formula of Concord (Epitome VI, 2-3): "[The Old Adam] must be coerced against his own will not only by admonitions and threats of the law, but also by its punishments and plagues, to follow the Spirit and surrender himself a captive."8 Thus for the Formula one and the same Christian can perform works of the law and fruits of the Spirit which are identified as good works.9 He also recognizes this dilemma which he finds within

⁶ XXI, 1

⁷ Ibid., pp. 78-9. Also see p. 243, n. 18, where Calvin, Charles Hodge, and Berkhof are listed as holding to a view which can be seen only as in agreement with Luther's.

⁸ Epitome VII, 3.

⁹ FC, Epitome V1,4-5.

himself in others, so that the same works may flow from both good and evil motives. On that account outward works can never be the absolute assurance of faith even to the Christian that he is a believer. The Augsburg Confession plainly teaches that good works must be done, but we can never rely on them. Whereas Luther would say that the church is present where the word is preached and the sacraments are administered, Calvin adds that discipline — and he means moral discipline — is a mark of the church. For Calvin and the Reformed tradition sanctification, even if it is defined only in the sense of restraint from sin, becomes measurable. Such a quantitative understanding of sanctification and the Christian life is alien to Lutheranism.

But the Christian cannot let this sense of inward unworthiness or the possibility that in performing the greatest good he may fall into sin prevent him from reckless abandon in doing good. In fact, just the opposite is true. Since the Christian is a justified sinner, he is given a carte blanche to engage in good works and this, may it be repeated, is to be done with reckless abandon. The good works which make up the subject of sanctification are not simply that the Christian refrains from gross immorality, but the distinctive character of sanctification in Lutheran theology consists in his abounding in good works.

On the surface it could hardly be demonstrated that Lutherans were greater sinners than those who have committed themselves, their theology, and their wishes for society to good works. The Lutheran argument is that they, not their Roman Catholic opponents who made works apart of justification, were more serious about moral behavior. In fact, thanks to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms which required obedience to civil rulers, Lutherans lived more peaceable lives than did many of their neighbors and probably still do. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms comes to expression in Augsburg Confession XVI: "Everyone, each one according to his own calling, is to manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life." This obligates the Christian to obey the civil authorities. Note here that good works or sanctification of the Christian life is given a secular hue. A person working in the mailing room of the American Bible Society has no religious advantage over another performing the same kind of labor for Sears. The followers of Zwingli and Calvin believed that Jesus would bring the final kingdom of God with him on the day of judgment, but as they are waiting, they have been determined to do a little building on earth. In some cases this kingdom building has been politically disruptive and in other cases involved institutionalizing Christian principles, as is current in our country, beginning with the election of Jimmy Carter through the work of Jerry Falwell and the candidacy of Pat Robertson. It was the followers of Zwingli who tore the statues down in the churches and whitewashed ancient paintings. John Knox, who out-Calvined Calvin, lead the revolt against Queen Mary of Scotland. The first Pilgrim and Puritan settlers who brought the tradition of Zwingli and Calvin to New England were the political revolutionaries of their day. Melchior Muhlenberg, the first significant Lutheran leader in America, in spite of his Pietistic education, was true to his Lutheran heritage in not getting involved in the war for American independence. Lutherans were, in comparison with the Protestants, docile, living out their lives in this world waiting for the next world and the appearing of the Lord Jesus. The reform of society today strangely finds its most virulent expression in the liberation theology among Roman Catholic clergy in Latin America, a point with which the current pontiff is uncomfortable.

It is the fate of Lutheranism to lie between the mammoths of Roman Catholic and Reformed (Protestant) theologies with their doctrines of good works and sanctification which are intrinsically inimical to Lutheran thought. Dividing Lutherans and Protestants is not simply a different sacramental perspective, but an essentially different world view. For Lutherans the kingdom of God comes in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, not in the moral improvement of the individual and society.

Through a process of intellectual infiltration, theological transfusion, religious exposure, and direct ingestion and imbibing, the authentic Lutheranism of Luther and the Confessions is lost and views inimical to the heart of our theology are held. Past history shows that, whereas Calvinism and Arminianism have never reached the point of extinction, Lutheranism frequently has. Sanctification is an area where Lutherans are vulnerable to Protestant influences and can be, have been, and are still overtaken by outside influences.

When Zondervan Publishing House published Five Views on Sanctification, it described this publication on the book-cover as "five major Protestant views on the subject of sanctification." Was it coincidental that the Lutheran view was not presented? Perhaps it was rather that Lutherans are not considered Protestants — for which we can be grateful. Or perhaps, even better, Lutherans do not have a distinctive contribution to make to the understanding of sanctification so far as other Christians are concerned.

The Lutheran position on sanctification is perhaps best known from Luther's Small Catechism. This document more than others has determined the form of Lutheran piety. In point of time, it precedes the writing of the other confessional documents and is probably more known and used than the others, though the Preface is rarely used but is still part of our confessional subscription. The Small Catechism, as we learned in confirmation class, is atypically the orderly Luther with its six parts arranged systematically followed by the prayers to be spoken each day. The Preface is vintage Luther as he ranges all over a number of topics.

His explanation in the Preface about the religious poverty of the Germans hardly reflects a Pietistic mind set: "Good God, what wretchedness I beheld." But as free-wheeling as Luther is, as he lashes out against the pope, bishops, and clergy; he is not confused, but operating with a consistent theological position. If the people refuse to

learn and believe the Catechism, they must be taught at least the difference between right and wrong if they expect to live in the city and to make a living there. "For anyone who desires to reside in a city is bound to know and observe the laws under whose protection he lives, no matter whether he is a believer or, at heart, a scoundrel or knave." This is easily recognizable as the first use of the law, which must, according to Article VI of the Formula of Concord, be applied to sinners and Christians. In so far as one does not want to become Christian he is a sinner.¹² Luther taught Wittenberg and cities of Saxony but not as Calvin did Geneva and Knox did Scotland. Still, for Luther, all must conform outwardly to the law, because only in this way can society survive. When it comes to good works which flow from faith, however, Luther does not speak of coercion. In the matter of receiving the Sacrament, which must be classified as one of the holiest good works if we dare put good works on a scale — Luther speaks of preaching the Gospel in such a way that the people will not have to be forced to go to the Sacrament, but will compel their pastors to administer it more often. Here is an example of how the good work of receiving the Sacrament is brought about by the preaching of the Gospel and not the law. To use the language of the Formula of Concord, the Christian "does everything from a free and merry spirit." Good works flow from the Gospel and not the law. Luther then inveighs against him who does not receive the Sacrament, because by his behavior such a person "has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no hell!" This is, of course, recognizable as the second use of the law. In speaking of sanctification, we are referring only to those good works which flow from faith in Christ and which are motivated not by the law but by the Gospel. Having said this, we repeat as do the Confessions, 14 that as long as we live, we are sinners who must be compelled by the law to do those things which our old natures hate. Even in this the Christian has a magnificent freedom, because of the doctrine of justification. God does not justify us only in so far as we are saints, but he also justifies us in so far as we are sinners. He justifies not only the godly in us, but the ungodly. This must be the presupposition for any understanding of sanctification. Without it, sanctification will revert to a silly, pedantic moralism which is afraid of performing any good, because it is afraid of falling into sin. Perhaps even worse is the person who believes that he is so sanctified that he identifies everything which he does as a good work itself and sets his own behavior as a standard for others. This is Pietism as its worse and is no better than the Pharisaism Jesus encountered.

To perform this task of showing the Small Catechism's understanding of sanctification and good works, it is easiest to follow the outline of Luther's Explanation of the Ten Commandments, something which I briefly touched upon in the previous essay on sanctification. Sometimes instructors of children for confirmation too

¹² SD VI, 17.

¹³ FC, SD, V1.17.

¹⁴ E.g., FC, Epitome V1,3. The SD speaks of the Old Adam as "a recalcitrant donkey [which]. . . must be coerced. . . frequently also with the club of punishments and miseries, until the flesh of sin is put off entirely and man is completely renewed in the resurrection."

quickly pass over the Ten Commandments to the Creed with the right motive that perhaps they should learn more about the Gospel than they do about the law. The motive to concentrate more on the creed and less on the commandments may be proper, but it reflects a failure to recognize the pivotal position Luther gives to the Ten Commandments and his understanding of them. The prohibition of the First Commandment not to worship false gods is given a new twist by Luther. It is literally turned inside out and put on its head. in a sense the original commandment is hardly recognizable. the prohibition against idolatry becomes an invitation to worship the true God: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." What was clearly recognizable as a statement of the law, when isolated from its context, becomes, in Luther's explanation, a sweet summons to believe. We are faced here with at least two problems: (1) Has Luther done violence to the original intent of the commandment in its original setting by turning a fierce prohibition into an invitation to faith? (2) Is the First Commandment a statement of the law or Gospel? Up front it looks like the law.

Luther took the First Commandment with the prohibition against the worship of false gods from Exodus 20:3, but in its original setting it is preceded by "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery," a statement of salvation and the Gospel. Israel's right to nationhood is not derived from itself but from God as an act of grace. He chose Israel. Israel did not choose Him. The prohibition against false gods is set forth not as a naked, moralistic command, but against the background that Israel belongs to God, and without God Israel is nothing. Going after false gods is inimical to her own existence. Worshiping false gods is not simply an abrogation of a prohibition, but a denial of her relationship with the God which has given the Israelites the right to be God's children. The children of the true God cannot, by definition, worship false gods without losing the right to a divine status among the nations of the world. Luther's explanation is not a free-wheeling exposition of the commandment, but one which recognizes its original setting which in effect gave Israel a heavenly charter. His explanation as an invitation to faith takes this theme into the era of the New Testament church, as he intended this commandment not for unbelievers, but for those who are already Christians. His catechism, including the commandments, is intended for believers, who have already heard the summons of God to believe in Christ. By saying that Christians "should fear, love, and trust in God above all things," Luther is asserting God's total and complete claim on the life of the Christian and the Christian's total commitment to God. Avoiding pagan worship is the presupposition to the commandment. Thus, Luther's explanation of the First Commandment presupposes God's activity in Christ for and in the believer and it thus embraces all of Christian behavior including faith and good works.

A critical scholar is forced to ask the question of how Luther can make Israel's release from the Egyptian slavery the basis of his issuing the invitation of the Gospel to believe in God and hence Christ. Some might say that Luther is dealing homiletically with the Egyptian experience. This hardly does justice to Luther, who follows the New Testament in recognizing the release from Egypt as the foundation of God's

redemption in Christ.15

The explanation of each of the nine remaining commandments begins with words taken from the explanation of the First Commandment, "We should fear and love God so we may not ..." Here follow prohibitions in the remaining nine commandments, with the exception of the sixth. The prohibitions are followed by statements of positive behavior. The Second Commandment reads, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." This is, in effect, Luther's explanation: "We should love God so much that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon Him in every time of trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." Luther here is writing not for an unbeliever, but for the man of faith; but a man of faith who realizes that he is not immune from sinning. The Christian is not so totally sanctified that it is impossible for him to swear and curse. In fact, the old man about which Luther speaks in the Fourth Part (Baptism) is in need of daily destruction. The Christian is a new man, but not in such a way that the Old Adam is completely dead. This old man is inclined to curse and swear by the name of the same God who has redeemed him in Christ. As long as the Christian lives, he must be warned and threatened not to engage in behavior and language unacceptable to God. Luther's method found further explication in Article VI of the Formula of Concord. Those who know Luther's explanations do not need to be reminded of his strong prohibitions against unacceptable behavior, such as despising God's word and its preaching, despising parents and superiors and provoking them to anger, hurting or harming a neighbor, obtaining a neighbor's property by dishonest means, lying, betraying, slandering, or defaming a neighbor, and planning to get hold of his possessions. What is marvelous about Luther's explanations of the commandments is that he involves not only the outward behavior, but the inward motivations of the heart. The attempt and scheming to do evil is also forbidden in the ninth and tenth commandments. the Large Catechism goes more specifically into desire, which is not mentioned explicitly in the Small Catechism. True, all these things bring the wrath of God, but we may not conclude that, if we refrain from such works, we have thereby begun to lead a sanctified life. I doubt if we could even say we were moral. It would be better to describe such behavior which sees as its goal only restraint from sinful behavior as moralistic.

Luther describes the sanctified life, the life which springs from faith and is engaged in good works, in the second part of the commandments with, the exception of the first and sixth commandments, where, affirmation constitutes the entire explanation. The Christian is praying to God, praising Him. and giving Him thanks. He is gladly hearing the word of God and believing. While Luther does not say here that receiving the sacraments is a good work, it may be a safe conclusion, since for him the hearing of the Gospel and receiving the sacraments are essential to his theology and the hearing of the Gospel is a good work. The Christian accepts his place in society and loves those who are placed in authority over him. He helps his neighbor in financial and physical

¹⁵ See, for example, Luther's hymn, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," where Christ is called the Pascal Lamb and bread of heaven.

need. He loves his spouse and speaks about the neighbor in the best possible terms, even when the evidence may suggest that other descriptions would be more fitting.

With these seemingly simple descriptions of the Christian life, Luther has moved beyond the first use of the law as curb against outward immoral behavior. He has moved beyond the second use of the law as a mirror to show how far we have fallen from God's good favor. In fact, in these positive affirmations, the old man is no longer in view. Theoretically, in the moment of the Gospel the old man becomes non-existent, though as a threat to faith he is always active. The Christian lives his life as belonging to God alone. Negative prohibitions in the moment of the Gospel and of faith are no longer necessary, since the Christian is alive to Christ and dead to sin and the law. By faith Christ is now living in him and he is no longer living, but Christ is living in him. In this moment the separate articles of Christology, justification, and sanctification have indeed become one cloth and one substance. The Christ who died for sins has taken full possession of him. Loving God, praying to God continually, believing His word, and helping his neighbor in every possible situation of distress are those characteristics which distinguish the Christian from every other human being. The Christian or sanctified life is Christological, first of all because Christ lives in us by faith; secondly it is Christ who is doing these works in us; and thirdly these works are clearly recognizable as those which Christ alone can do and which He in fact does in us. Thus when we do theology, we can in a certain sense say we begin with Christology and then proceed to justification and then sanctification; but in another sense sanctification is the continued manifestation of Christology in the world. The Christian does the works of Christ. The Formula describes it in this way: "Fruits of the Spirit, however, are those works which the Spirit of God, who dwells in the believers, works through the regenerated, and which the regenerated perform in so far as they are reborn and do them as spontaneously as if they knew of no command, threat, or reward. In this sense the children of God live in the law and walk according to the law of God. In his epistles St. Paul calls it the law of Christ and the law of mind.¹⁶

In the explanation of the second article Luther speaks of believers in Jesus serving Him in "everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." Here Luther is seeing the broad expanse of the Christian life, beginning with baptism and stretching into eternity, a life which is not even disrupted by death. What the Christian does on earth, he will also do in the next life. But what is that activity which spans heaven and earth? This is described in the first three commandments: he fears, loves, trusts in God, prays to His name, and hears His word. This certainly describes what He does here on earth and what he is always doing in heaven. But how does the Christian serve Christ on earth in all righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. He loves his neighbor as Christ loves the neighbor. This is instigated by the Holy Spirit, not as an independent principle in the Trinity, but as the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit who brought conception to the Virgin Mary and was active in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, remains

active in the life of the believer, not only bringing and preserving him in the true faith, but performing in and through him the good works which Christ did on earth. The Spirit-directed life is a completely Christological life, because the Spirit who was responsible for His conception is the same Spirit whom Christ sent into the world.

The third use of the law has been a controverted point, denied by some Lutherans. It is formally held by the Reformed but in such a way that it is defined in a different way. The deniers of the third use of the law are right in the sense that they say that Christians as Christians do not need the law in the sense of negative prohibition. As the Formula says, the regenerated do good works "as if they knew of no command, threat, or reward." Christians as Christians, however, do not have to hear God say "hands off." Rather their hands are doing those things which please God. This is true as far as it goes. The Gospel provides the motivation for good works, but without a third use of the law, we are left without a definition or description of what these good works should be. It simply will not do to understand the sanctified life or the third use of the law as simply refraining from sin. The third use of the law cannot be defined as the application of the law as negative prohibition to the life of the Christian. This is the first use of the law. Rather it must be positively defined and understood as the performing of the good works of compassion and forgiveness. Article VI of the Formula of Concord would better be entitled "The Three Uses of the Law" and not simply "The Third Use of the Law." This article speaks of the law as a negative in its first two uses; however, in the third use of the law, there is strictly speaking no negative. it is true that the third use of the law never stands alone in the life of the Christian, but the third use of the law is the positive description of Christ and of what the Christian is doing in good works. The law with its prohibitions and threats can never be a motivation for Christian living. It can prevent us from gross sin, but it cannot produce good works. This only the Gospel can do. As the Formula says, only the Gospel creates good works in believers.¹⁷ The problem lies in the double meaning of the word law as both prohibition of immoral behavior and description of Christ-like behavior.¹⁸ This distinction is fundamental to Luther's understanding of the commandments and without it the most erroneous and bizarre interpretations of sanctification are bound to emerge. The law before the entrance of sin was a positive description of God's relationship to the world and in turn man's necessary response to God. The law was as much indicative as it was imperative. Man served God not out of any threats but because it belonged to his nature. In stepping outside of this relationship, the law took on a completely negative hue. "Thou shalt not" now described God's relationship to man. Man's sin and not God was responsible for seeing God as the enemy with His warnings of death for the sinner. In Christ the law has been satisfied. Its requirements have been fulfilled and its penalties suffered. The Christian in Christ is now free from the law. It is at this point that Luther begins his explanations of the commandments.

¹⁷ FC, SD, V1, 10.

¹⁸ The Formula is aware of the twofold understanding of the word "law" in the New Testament.

The Christian is standing in Christ, in God's grace, but he is never far removed from the borderline of sin. When he sins, the law's condemnation comes down as severely on him as on anyone else. He prays to God that he may not curse, swear, and defile God's word. He also as a Christian sees God's law as positive affirmation in his life. The Formula is very careful to speak of only one law of God as an expression of His immutable will, which coerces the sinner and by which he does everything according to a willing spirit.¹⁹ Since he loves God, he loves the neighbor and his love of the neighbor is the proof that he loves God. In a sense he has become like the original pair in Eden who knew God and His law in a positive light; however, such a return to the pristine purity of the primitive situation is not completely possible. Not only have the law as negative prohibition and sin entered the world, but the law has been satisfied in Christ and sin removed by His death. The Christian goes back to Eden in a new and different sense. He is not put back into the place of the first Adam and Eve, but he is made a new creature in the Second Adam, the man from heaven. He does good works which do conform to the original relationship of law as positive relationship between God and His rational creature, but more significantly he does good works which now, not only conform to, but are motivated and, in fact, performed by Christ Himself.

The law and Gospel which stood in antithetical relationship for the world in sin find their perfect harmony and unity first in Christ who has fulfilled the law and given us the Gospel, but also now in the sanctified life of the Christian. The good works which Adam could do before he sinned and could never do as a sinner, we can now do in Christ and as Christ did. This is Luther's understanding of good works in the Small Catechism and in doing this he showed us how Christology, justification, and sanctification belong together.



THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW: RESOLVING THE TENSION

(July/October 2005)

The Third Use of the Law: Resolving the Tension

JULY/OCTOBER 2005

HILE preparing this essay, a pastor reminded me that I had spoken on this topic several times and that this title may have been anticipated in the paragraph heading, "Overcoming the Contradiction Between the Law and the Gospel," in a previous essay. He also added that it was unlikely that I could say anything new. But situations change. One size does not fit all. Dogmatics has a way of slipping into reverse gear and reverting to historical theology so that each loses its distinctive character. Familiar things can and must be addressed differently. An often-reworked title by Paul Tillich, How My Mind Has Changed, is taken up as a manifesto for those who want to rid themselves of the past as quickly and as often as possible. In looking back at what Queen Elizabeth called her "salad days," I have come to see some things differently. In the 1970s the ordination of women and in the 2000s the ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriages have kept the law and gospel distinction in the middle of the theological debate. These practices are allowed, it is argued, because the gospel frees one from moral and ethical restraints. So, the inebriated farmer peasant who at one time falls into the predictability of legalism now falls into antinomianism's lack of restraint.

I. A ONE-SIDED COIN: GOSPEL ALONE

Antinomianism is the belief that Christians are by faith free from all laws and moral or ethical standards. If certain biblical citations disallow women pastors, the gospel takes precedence, so it is argued. Consecration of a gay bishop in the Anglican Communion and proposals to legitimize the ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriages in Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) keep the issues alive.² Such proposals are too radical for the LCMS, but the ordination of women continues to surface. Recently an emeritus pastor claimed that some pastors, whom he identified as confessional, are antinomian in not giving enough attention in their sermons to Christian sanctification which he described as crucifying the flesh, putting down the old man and putting on the new man. Without names or details, we can only respond to how he defines antinomianism. Crucifying the flesh and putting down the old man are never past tense, but they are the work of the law.

¹ David P. Scaer, "The Law and the Gospel in Lutheran Theology," Logia 3 (1994): 27-24.

This was also the issue with the faculty walkout from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis in February 1974. Edward Schroeder who then was on the faculty writes the following: "The second heresy was on the so-called 'third use of God's law,' a constant hot potato among Lutherans ever since the 16th century. Our 'false teaching' on the law's 'third use' was that we opted for Elert's Gospel-grounded interpretation and not the one the LCMS had supposedly 'always' taught." Sabbatheology Newsletter (Thursday Theology #336 [November 18, 2004]).

Putting on the new man is the work of Christ (gospel) and is truly sanctification.³ We do not put on an abstract holiness or morality, but we put on Christ — his life, his works, his sacraments, his death, his absolution, his resurrection, ascension, and session at the Father's right hand. These things are ours by a baptism into his death and resurrection, and by faith we are sanctified. The things of Christ that are ours by faith have nothing to do with the law's threats. Guilt is prior to and necessary for faith and sanctification but has no place in faith and sanctification by which Christ lives in us. After coming to faith by the gospel, the Christian is revisited by the law and his sense of guilt will increase especially in light of Christ's holy life. The Spirit's *opus alienurn* increases his sense of inadequacy and makes him more miserable as he copes with a sinful reality he cannot escape.

II. PRIOR CHRISTOLOGICAL REALITIES

God's sovereignty is neither enhanced nor satisfied because of the sinner's suffering or death. He takes pleasure in the sinner's dilemma only in the sense that self-mortification prepares him for the Gospel. Human misery does not make God happy. He is not impassive or detached from man's fallen condition. Quite to the contrary, whenever the sinner is brought to Christ, joy escapes its divine boundaries and echoes in the mouths of angels (Luke 15:7). Good works please God first because they come from him and are established in and done by Christ, who did them freely because of what God made him:

[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness [KJV: justification] and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." (I Cor 1:30-31)⁴

God is the source of our wisdom (the gospel of the crucified Christ), justification, sanctification, and redemption, because he placed these things in Christ. Only because they are found in and done by him can they be found in and accomplished by us through faith in him. Good works are done freely without compulsion by Christians just as they were done freely by Christ. Call this subjective sanctification, if you want. Just as the church, the *una sancta*, is the prior reality to every congregation, so Christ as our sanctification is a prior reality before we come to faith and do its works. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). Thoughts of moral or ethical self-appreciation, quantification, and admiration are annulled by the words, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord," a passage describing a scene of bodies decomposing into fertilizer (Jer 9:22-24).⁵ In a situation of human misery and depravity, God's glory

³ Desperation worked by the law so that the believer loses the sense of God's presence belongs to sanctification. The cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Matt 27:46; Mark 1534) is eminently the cry of Christ, also of Adam, David, and every believer. This sense of abandonment is a holy work of God, dare we say the holiest, because in that moment we have no choice but to flee to Christ alone who is our wisdom, our justification, our sanctification, and our redemption.

⁴ In Greek: δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἀγιασμὸς καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις.

^{5 &}quot;Thus says the LORD: 'The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves after the reaper, and none shall gather them.' Thus says the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the

is the only act in town. At the heart of the Lutheran Reformation is the confession that we of ourselves can do no good works. This applies as much to our justification by which we face God with confidence as it does to our sanctification by which we face the world. Our sanctification is not only patterned after Christ's works (moral theory of the atonement), but is already present in him in the same way wisdom (gospel), justification, and redemption are present. Only by faith can sanctification become a personal, existential reality for the Christian. Neither in Christ nor in us are these disconnected things, but, in the one moment of the Cross, God has made him to be our wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption — they are what God made Christ, what Christ is and did, and what he does in us. He who hears God's wisdom and believes has redemption, justification, and sanctification.

Lutheran arguments with Rome were not about redemption — the doctrine that Christ made atonement for sin — but about justification; however, by denying the sole agency of God in justification, Rome compromised its doctrine of redemption by depriving believers of its benefits. Grace becomes something in us instead of how He in Christ relates to the world. Justification is collapsed into sanctification and its objectivity is lost. A synergism inherent in sanctification seeped into justification, and these two doctrines became indistinguishable from the other. Yet Christ is as much our sanctification as he is our justification and redemption. Sanctification is God's work in us for others. "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" applies not only to the atonement but also to the gospel, that divine wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption. Just as there can be no subjective justification in faith without a prior justification in Christ (objective justification), so there are no good works that the Christian does that Christ has not already done. Christ is on both sides of the equation. He does the good works in us and he is their recipient.

III. LUTHERAN AND REFORMED: SAME TERMS, DIFFERENT CONTENT

Both Lutherans and Reformed have a place for the law's accusatory function (second use) in preparing for the gospel⁸ and its directive function for the Christian life (third use), but each sees the relation of the law and the gospel differently. One Reformed theologian writes: "Reformed theology affirms a polarity but not an

mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight,' says the LORD."

⁶ See David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," Concordia Theological Quarterly 49 (1985): 181-189; "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," Concordia Theological Quarterly 53 (1989):165-182.

⁷ Matt 25:44-46: "Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

⁸ So, Luther: "The foremost office or power of the law is that it reveals inherited sin and its fruits. It shows human beings into what utter depths their nature has fallen and how completely corrupt it is" (SA III,2,4). Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, tr. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 312.

antithesis between the Law and the Gospel." The latter view characterizes the Lutheran position. The condemning law and the forgiving gospel have a simultaneous impact on the Christian, who for life remains as much a believer as he does an unbeliever. His condition is described as *simul iustus et peccator*. For the Reformed "the Law awakens the consciousness of the need of redemption," a problematic view for Lutherans for whom the law offers no hope and only more misery.

Differences also surface on the third use of the law.¹² In Reformed thought the law accuses the unbeliever (second use), brings him to Christ, and "is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation" (third use). Thus, the law along with faith generates good works. The new man remains lazy and needs the law to remind him of his duty.¹³ Lutherans see legalism in this definition.¹⁴ Contrast the Reformed view with Luther, for whom faith

. . .is also a very mighty, active, restless, busy thing, which at once renews a man, gives him a second birth, and introduces him to a new manner and way of life, so that it is impossible for him not to do good without ceasing. For as naturally as a tree bears fruit good works follow faith.¹⁵

For Lutherans, the law is the standard of good works as suggested by the Latin phrase usus didacticus seu nomaticus for the third use, but it does not motivate them. ¹⁶ One influential Reformed theologian understands the Lutheran position that the law as

- 9 Donald G. Bloesch, "Law and Gospel in Reformed Perspective," Grace Theological Journal, 12 (Fall 1991): 181.
- 10 See Jan Rohls, Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen, tr. John Hoffmeyer, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 193-197. In preparing for the gospel, Lutheran and Reformed theologies have called the law's accusatory function its pedagogical use. Francis Pieper notes that some Lutheran theologians spoke of four uses of the law, a distinction with which he had no difficulty: 1) usus politicus or civilis; 2) usus elenchticus [accusatory]; 3) usus paedagogicus; 4) usus didacticus seu normaticus. In this scheme the second and third uses are customarily seen as carrying out the same function as a prerequisite for the gospel; Christian Dogmatics, 3 Vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951-1953), 3:238, n. 29. The Reformed see the second use of the law pointing to Christ and thus favor calling it the usus paedagogicus. The word pedagogical has its roots in Greek and refers to the servant or the slave who takes the child to school, but he is not the child's teacher. In Lutheran theology it is used of the accusatory function of the law in preparing for the gospel.
- 11 Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 9th reprint (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 615.
- 12 Michael S. Horton makes every attempt to make the Reformed position appear similar to the Lutheran one; however, his references to Beza's idea that the Spirit works through the law and that, after the gospel has brought about conversion, the law can provide directions suggests an entirely different world view. "Calvin and the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic," *Pro Ecclesia*, 6 (Winter 1997):27-42.
- 13 John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. tr. Tony Lane and Hillary Osbome (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); Institutes 2.7.12. See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Greg L. Bahnsen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996). 175-199.
- 14 The Reformed are aware that their view is seen as legalism by Lutherans; see Henrikus Berkhof, Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith, tr. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, 454. Elert saw the third use of the law as an intrusion of Calvinism into Lutheranism. So, Scott R. Murray: "Calvin's contention that the Law itself gives motivation for Christian holiness is absolutely irreconcilable with the Lutheran structure of Law and Gospel where the Gospel is the sole motivation for good works." Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 95.
- 15 Martin Luther, Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 10, pt. 111 (Weimar: H. Bohlau, 1910),285; WA 10.ILI:285.
- 16 SD VI,18. "[Believers] live and walk in the law of the Lord and yet do nothing because of the compulsion of the law."

regulation and condemnation serves only to keep believers as sinners in check (second use) and does not promote holiness. Another theologian claims that, for Lutherans, Christ and not the law is the norm of righteousness¹⁷ and so sees antinomianism lurking in Lutheran theology.¹⁸ For Lutherans the law fulfilled in and by Christ is normative for Christian life, and in this sense, it is normative and can be fulfilled (third use). As sinners, Christians are threatened by the law to do works that may be good according to external standards, but from faith they also do works pleasing to God. They are the works of Christ spontaneously motivated by the Spirit flowing from faith (SD VI,17).19 Divine wrath as a motivation for good works for Lutherans confuses the law with the gospel. The law's prohibitions and threats belong in the second use and not the third, according to which the law is transformed by Christ so that it expresses God's original intentions to the world. Christians as unbelievers can never escape the law's prohibitions and threats (SD VI, 23-24). Simultaneously and often with the same deeds, they live under the law and the gospel as enemies and friends of God. They live a Nestorian-like existence with two incompatible forces at war with no communication between saint and sinner: simul iustus et peccator (SD VI, 7-9).20 Ironically, one work can flow from two motivations. Calvin sees the Christian as a composite person who is not zealous to do good works and thus needs the law to prod. Conversely in Lutheran theology, the sinner is caught between two realities: the same God who rejects him accepts him in Christ. He believes but is never relieved from divine accusation. Conversion is a one-time occurrence but its experience of going from unfaith to faith is repeated each day. Daily the old man is drowned, and daily a new man comes forth.

¹⁷ Thus Louis Berkhof's critique: "It is not surprising that this third use of the Law occupies no important place in [the Lutheran] system. a rule they treat of Law only in connection with the doctrine of human misery." Systematic Theology, 615. Richard A. Muller claims that the Lutheran position on the third use of the law was a reaction to work righteousness. "The Law, for Lutheranism, can never become the ultimate norm for Christian living but, instead, must always lead to Christ who alone is righteous." Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 321. These observations contradict Luther's objections to Agricola's claim that the law had no function in the Christian life; see Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 Vols., 1953. The Formula of Concord is quite definite in saying that the law does function in the Christian life. "However, when people are born again through the Spirit of God and set free from the law (that is, liberated from its driving powers and driven by the Spirit of Christ), they live according to the unchanging will of God, as comprehended in the law, and do everything, insofar as they are born from a free and merry spirit" SD VI,17.

¹⁸ See e.g., Kaiser, "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," 185; and also his "Response to Douglas Moo," in Five Views on Law and Gospel, ed. Greg L. Bahnsen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 399.

¹⁹ For a presentation of the Lutheran position see, Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 198.

²⁰ In Luther's theology, saint and sinner are distinct realities within one person. For the Reformed these personal realities are blended so that Luther's distinction plays no role. Within the dimension of this Eutychian-like definition of human personality so the Christian as Christian is not distinct from his sinful nature, the law can be used to prod the believer. "[Calvin] acknowledged that the Law is also a tutor that leads one to Christ, but he was equally emphatic that the Law is also a divinely-given standard that keeps us in conformity with the will of God revealed in Christ." Bloesch, "Law and Gospel in Reformed Perspective," 180. According to this definition law and gospel are not as distinct in their functions as they are for Lutherans.

For the Reformed, conversion initiates a process of moral improvement advanced by both the law and the gospel and can be charted.²¹ In contrast, the Lutherans hold that the law as prohibition and condemnation provides neither a negative nor a positive motivation for the life that is specifically Christian. As sinner he remains subject to divine wrath (second use), but as a believer his works are not motivated by the law's threats but by faith (third use).²² Sanctification is characterized not so much as an absence of moral blemish (which is impossible),²³ but by the freedom to do good works that assist and help the neighbor. He begins again to live that life destined for him in paradise (the first use) and helps others as God in Christ did (third use). Good works are those God destined for him in creation and done by Christ. These are works done by faith. Sanctification is rooted in creation and redemption and displays both.

We return to the Reformed critique: "The Law, for Lutheranism, can never become the ultimate norm for Christian living but, instead, must always lead to Christ who is righteousness." Guilty as charged! Law as accusation is not the norm for the Christian life; however, now fulfilled in Christ (gospel) the law does direct the Christian's conduct (third use). Without the law's threats, it is faith that performs good works, or better, Christ himself is doing these good things in believers. The third use has to do not with impossible possibility but with the reality that is present in Christ himself. Impossible imperatives become descriptive of what already exists in Christians and what they do. The third use is descriptive of what the Christian is doing in Christ, and what he will do. He exercises his mind on good things (see, e.g., Ps 1; 119).

Reformed theology rightly sees the third use of the law as the ultimate goal for the Christian in this world, but their definition includes self-conscious moral improvement. For Lutherans the law can also be seen as the goal of Christian life, but it must be defined as a completed law that is fulfilled in Christ without threat. Paradoxically, the Christian has no internal evidence or feeling that he is fulfilling the law. Rather than seeing himself progressing towards a greater autonomous holiness, he becomes increasingly aware that he stands *coram deo* as a sinner.²⁵ His experiences contradict what he is in God's eyes. As faith increases, so does the awareness of sin

²¹ See Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 748-751. For a presentation of the Lutheran position and a critique of the view that sanctification involves verifiable progress, see Steven A. Hein, "Getting Clear on Sanctification," Issues Etc. Journal, vol. 3, no. 3:12-14,17. Hein says that sanctification "is not a separate work of God from justification. Rather, both are simply different aspects of God's saving work through the same saving grace which is ours through faith (16). The opposing view is that justification and sanctification are different works of God. Justification is accomplished by grace and then "we are sanctified by the grace of the Spirit's power that energizes a holy obedience to the precepts of the Law" (12). Greater levels of obedience to the law are then reached (12).

²² The Reformed view of the third use of law reinforces their concepts of the sovereignty of God. His glory is seen in the moral rectitude of his rational creatures. In Lutheran theology, however, God's glory is seen in believers who, when faced with the law, constantly repent by turning away from their sins and being justified by faith in Christ.

²³ SD VI.7

²⁴ Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms, 321.

²⁵ The Solid Declaration demonstrates this point with four references from St. Paul: Rom 7:18; 7:15; 7:23; and Gal 5:37 (SD VI, 8). The quotation of the first will suffice: "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh."

and the sense of unrighteousness. By looking at himself from the position of who he is in Christ, the believer becomes increasingly aware of his miserable condition. Thus, Melanchthon can write: "if we had to believe that after our renewal we must become acceptable not by faith but on account of keeping of the law, our conscience would never find rest" (Ap IV,179). Christians hear the gospel and by faith are perfected in Christ and share his righteousness (third use), but within the reality of their own experience, they see themselves more and more as sinners condemned by the law (second use). We live and die as sinners (second use) pleading only for God's mercy in Christ (gospel). For the Reformed, God's majesty is seen in his electing some for salvation and leaving others under the law's curse. In Lutheran theology the law as accusation (second use) belongs to God's pity for sinners because, without this, the gospel is without effect. The Lutheran doctrine of the third use of the law is then rooted in the article of justification and confirms the article on good works. The law is then rooted in the article of justification and confirms the article on good works.

IV. LEX SEMPER ACCUSAT: THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

Lutherans have been caught between legalism and antinomianism over the question of whether and why good works were necessary. This problem can be understood in relation to the phrase from the Apology that "the Law always accuses us" (semper accusat), it always shows us that God is wrathful.²⁸ When the law's threats are inserted into the life of faith, the third use becomes indistinguishable from the second use, a view similar to the Reformed understanding that appears in some Evangelical causes (Billy Graham rallies, Promise Keepers, the Purpose Driven Life), independent Bible churches, and Evangelical-styled colleges. In the face of the moral breakdown in society and church, some Lutherans are attracted to these causes. Legalism's attraction rests in the satisfaction it gives by identifying which moral bases have been touched.

Opposite from legalism is the antinomian view that the law's accusations apply to the Christian only as sinner, *lex semper accusat*, and not to Christian life. Challenges to the third use of the law, or the use of this phrase, rest on this understanding. Things once prohibited by the law are now allowed by the gospel. This position was known as gospel reductionism, a phrase now rarely heard. Since some prohibitions are presently up for discussion in the ELCA, some of its congregations and clergy persons are evaluating their continued association with that denomination. Some are already on board Peter's ark; others are in the lifeboats.

Of the three uses of the law, the second is predominant in Lutheran thought because the law is in juxtaposition to the gospel. Law and gospel is Lutheran cliche. The origins of both legalism and antinomianism can be explained in relation to the second use of the law. Legalism merges the law with its prohibitions and threats (second use)

²⁶ This is evident in the first edition of the Institutes (1536), 1.1.1-2.8.3. Thus, also Jan Rohls writes: "... God wills to reveal divine glory in the election of some human beings and the rejection of others." *Reformed Confessions*, 151.

^{27 &}quot;For we do not abolish the law, Paul says [Rom 3:31]. But we establish it, because when we receive the Holy Spirit by faith the fulfillment of the law necessarily follows, through which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit continually grow" (Ap XX,15).

^{28 &}quot;Lex semper accusat nos, semper ostendit irasci Deum" (Ap IV,128).

into the third. For antinomianism, the second use exhausts the meaning of law for Christians as sinner, and concludes that it has no place in Christian life. In Lutheran theology, the first and second uses function negatively. In the first use, God through temporal threats maintains order. The threats of the second use are eternal and are directed by the revealed word to the conscience. Since Lutherans see the law in such negative terms, they may lose sight of any positive view of it.

In commenting on the governmental structure from Hammurabi up to nineteenthcentury England, Percy Miller gives what appears to be a definition of a first use of the law from a non-theological stance. He notes that these systems "specify those actions which people should not perform and punishments to be imposed upon those among them." The law is "an instrument for restraint, for inhibition." ²⁹ A recent essay argues that the first use deals with divinely implanted structures that are embedded in the creation before the fall, which now take form or reemerge for Christians in the third use.30 Thus, the third use is more than a matter of removing the curse attached to the second use, which is inherent in a Christological interpretation of the third use; it is also a return to or restatement of how things were before the fall. Things that should have been, but were not, now take form in the Christian life. God does not set arbitrary moral standards for good and evil, but good works are an extension of who or what he is, and they revive what is already inherent in creation and corrupted by sin. Defined in this way, the law does not stand in an antagonistic relationship with the gospel. This is not simply a return to paradise, that is, to what the law was then, but a republication of the law in Christ. In fulfilling the law in Christ, the church is really a new creation. Works done from faith (third use) correspond to works done according to the first use. This understanding is suggested by the Latin terms for the first use (usus politicus or usus civilis), that is, they describe how people relate to one another because they are first related to God by law.

Lex semper accusat is absolute only in the world of sin, and its threatening horrors were accentuated by Christ coming to rescue sinners. It did not occupy this place of prominence in paradise nor will it in the resurrection. Christ's death had universal dimensions (1 John 1:2). In raising him from the dead, God found Jesus to be the righteous man and divine righteousness itself, and hence, the law can no longer accuse him.³¹ The lex semper accusat brought Christ to crucifixion, and by him death was destroyed. Its accusatory power for Christ and for those in Christ was removed by God raising him from the dead. The believer, because and in so far as (quia et quatenus) he is in Christ, is no longer accused by the law and is raised to a new life,³² but his experience does not let him escape.

²⁹ Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind of America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, hc., 1965), 207.

³⁰ Piotr J. Malysz, "The Third Use of the Law in Light of Creation and the Fall," in *The Law in Holy Scripture*, ed. Charles A. Gieschen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 211-237.

^{31 &}quot;For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom 6:9-10).

^{32 &}quot;So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11).

The problem —and it is the real problem because he can never escape it — is that the Christian lives in two realities. In Christ he is righteous, but in his body he sees something else at work. It is almost as if he was never converted.³³ He trembles before the law and runs from it. If he believes he has fulfilled it, he comes face to face with its condemnations and is spiritually mutilated. His life is one of frustrated misery. Seeing complete failure, he awaits divine judgment. In the moment of moral deficiency, the moment of dereliction in which the prayer "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is uttered, he flees to Christ and finds a completely different reality: Christ is as much his sanctification as he is his redemption and justification. Sanctification is a one-step back to Eden and another step beyond paradise to a holiness that was still a hope for our first parents. The dilemma of how our good works is inevitably God's and his alone was resolved by an anonymous writer:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:12-13)

The passage is clear in attributing our good works to God, but it goes one step further in identifying the Holy Communion as the way in which God works good works in and through us. In some translations, the words "by the blood of the eternal covenant" refer to how God brought Jesus back from the dead, but these words are reminiscent of Matthew's institution of the Supper in which Jesus identifies the blood of the Eucharist as the blood of the covenant by which he offered an atonement to God. It is not that God works directly in us or simply through the Spirit, but he works in us through Jesus and specifically through His blood, His sacramental blood because it is first and always a sacrificial blood. This is the blood of the eternal covenant which equips us to do what is pleasing in his sight. The dilemma of the law and the gospel is capable of being theologically harmonized but not experientially. The Christian lives within the contradictory realities of having a God who has given him all things, which in attempting to reach eludes his grasp. This is the great Lutheran contradiction.

V. THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW IN THE GOSPELS

The third use considers man in that moment, which exists in faith rather than in real time, when he is without sin and sees the law not as demand but as fulfilled. When he stops to consider whether he has fulfilled the law, faith is lost. Since the word law is used in the phrase "third use of the law," this use can be understood as a negative factor in the Christian's life. As such, we may have a reason for removing it from theological discourse. The third use, however, presupposes the gospel and extends it into the life of the Christian. In fulfilling the law according to its third use, the Christian is doing what he believes. If we can agree that a Christology can be constructed out of the

^{33 &}quot;But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom 7:23).

positive affirmations of the Ten Commandments, then some objections to the third use may be removed. Christ has suffered the law's penalties and has fulfilled its positive commands. He loves the neighbor more than himself. The Creed is embedded in the first three commandments. Idolatry, a form of unbelief, is replaced by a faith that fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things (SC I,1). Such faith proves itself by calling upon this God especially in times of distress (the Second Commandment) and hearing and believing God's word (the Third Commandment). In crying out from the Cross, Christ did these things and gave us an example to follow. Luther's explanations of the Ten Commandments take us as sinners from the law's prohibitions to the gospel's invitation, making us believers. From the posture of faith, the Christian proceeds to live (third use).³⁴

In his explanations Luther overcame the radical contradiction between the law and the gospel in the moment of the believer's faith without eradicating the contradiction between believer and unbeliever, the *simul iustus et peccator*. Christians who can view themselves only as sinners accomplish the good things that only Christ can do. Luther's we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things matches his explanation of the introduction to the Lord's Prayer: Here God would encourage us to believe that he is truly our Father (SC III, 2). Christ transforms the law's prohibitions and threats into gospel. The reformer was not playing fast and free with the commandments, since they begin with God's redemptive claim on Israel: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of bondage (Exod 20:2). Israel's craving for foreign gods may have put the weight of the commandment on preventing idolatry, but the other side of the coin was faith in God. Since God made Israel his people, he excluded other gods from their devotion. The prohibition confirmed Israel's faith in the God of Abraham who delivered them.

In response to a scribe's question, Jesus defined the true religion as loving God

³⁴ Luther's explanation of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism is an exposition on faith and life. For example, "Learn from these words, then, how angry God is with those who rely on anything but Himself, and again, how kind and gracious He is to those who trust and believe Him alone with their whole heart" (LC I,32). "He makes no other demand of us than a hearty trust in Him for all blessings" (LC I,47). Most importantly for the third use of the law, "For, as I said before, where the heart is right with God and this commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the other will follow of its own accord (LC I,4).

³⁵ Perfect renewal in this life is impossible, so the moment where faith exists without sin is as real as it is elusive. Christians "spontaneously, without any instruction, admonition, exhortation, or driving by the Law they would do what they are obligated to according to the will of God, just as the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven regularly run theirs courses according to the order which without any admonition, exhortation, compulsion, coercion, or necessity, and as the holy angels render God a completely spontaneous obedience" (SD VI,6). Thus, "The law and the gospel did not express a chronological sequence by an existential awareness of God I which Lutheran found himself as saint and sinner at the same time;" Scaer, "The Law and the Gospel in Lutheran Theology," 28.

³⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, tr. Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959),346.

^{37 &}quot;As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God" (LC I,2).

³⁸ Some early editions of the Catechism kept the words "I am the Lord your God" at the introduction of the Decalogue. Tappert, The Book of Concord, 342, n. 2.

and the neighbor (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34).³⁹ Closely related to these passages is the pericope of the rich young man (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). Both episodes revolve around obtaining eternal life. These passages entered the Reformation debate in the Lutheran objections to their use by Roman Catholic opponents to introduce works into the article on justification (Ap IV, 122-182). Later liberal theology virtually defined the entire religion of Jesus as doing good. As a reaction to these views, some Lutherans may have reacted to list commands to love God and the neighbor as the second use of law. This step may not be necessary. In a preliminary way it can be noted that Luther sees love as a dimension of faith (SC I, I). Works performed by Christians are done out of love and not according to the compulsion of the law (FC VI). Simuliustus et peccator describes not only the believer but also his works. More important is looking at the controverted passages themselves.

Jesus makes love both the content of the Old Testament and the key to its interpretation: "On these two commandments [loving God and the neighbor] depend all the Law and the prophets" (Matt 22:40). Since he fulfills the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17), these commandments are descriptive of his preaching and that of the apostles (1Cor 13:13; Eph 1:4; 1 John 4). These commandments then are not peripheral but define Christianity. Both love of God and love of neighbor pertain to faith. In doing them, the third use of the law is fulfilled. This use is not an embarrassing appendage to the characteristic Lutheran definition of the law as divine accusation, but the glorious triumph of the law reaching its destined goal in the gospel.

The pericope of the rich young man elucidates this. He has heard the gospel, believed, and by his own admission renounced sin. Renunciation of sin (law), faith, and his determination to lead a moral life bring him to the edge of discipleship. In Mark 10:18 there is even the suggestion that he recognizes Jesus for who he really is. Faith and morality are not enough, but must be supplemented by his providing for the poor. Only then will he find treasure in heaven. This, however, the young man cannot do and goes away in sorrow. Providing for the neighbor (third use), which is the sign that he has understood who Jesus is and what he requires, proves to be more difficult than an external morality which refrains from overt evil (first use). The latter he has accomplished. In the Small Catechism, Luther touches upon this theme in saying that the Seventh Commandment requires that we financially advance our neighbor's lot (SC I, 13). By helping the poor, the rich man would have done precisely that. Again, Luther, now in the Large Catechism: "We shall be richly rewarded for the help and kindness we show to our neighbor, as King Solomon teaches in Proverbs 19:17, 'He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, He will repay him for his deed" (LC I,272). In loving the neighbor, one loves God. Love of the neighbor is the natural extension of faith, though it is not a reason for God justifying the sinner (AP IV, 152-154).

Though earlier confessions do not know the phrase third use of the law and there remain differences about its continued use in theology, the idea is included in

the fundamental Lutheran belief that faith by itself necessarily produces good works. More significant than anything else is that Jesus identifies love of God as "the great commandment" (Matt 22:36-38). Love of the neighbor is not only next in importance, but "is like it" (v. 39). Together they comprise the law and the prophets.⁴⁰ Loving God and the neighbor are distinguished by love's objects and not by their emotional intensity. So, 1 John 4:20-21: "We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. "When faith exists without loving the neighbor, it is only historical knowledge (Ap IV, 50-52). As trust, faith is immediately active in performing good works (third use).

At first glance a contradiction may exist between identifying the love of God and others as the content of the Scriptures (Matt 22:40) and asserting that Jesus is also (Matt 5:17; Acts 10:43). The Lutheran Confessions confirm this by recognizing the gospel as their chief content and only goal (SD XI, 12). As long as the commands to love God and the neighbor are understood as unfulfilled Law (second use), the contradiction stands.

Commands to love God and neighbor, however, are trinitarian in origin. Love is the fundamental unity by which the three persons of the Trinity are bound to each other (John 15:9-10, 12-13; 17:24) and thus the determinative factor in motivating creation, incarnation, redemption, and sanctification. God's love in sending the Son for our redemption originates in who he is (John 3:16). In loving God, we are only assuming the same attitude he shows with us. Commands to love him are not moral abstractions but invitations to believe in him as a God who is love. He can be approached in love rather than in fear of wrath. In the imperative to love, God creates that love. This the law cannot do (second use). Loving God is not a level higher than faith, but describes faith as trusting in God. Arminianism, Methodism, and the Holiness groups see love as a level that perfects faith and is beyond it.⁴¹ Understood in this way, love as something beyond faith informs what they think of sanctification. Love in this way is nothing else than law!⁴² This higher level of commitment is often called discipleship, a condition in which faith is said to be taken more seriously. This is a fiction of its own creation and

⁴⁰ In the New Testament, the Greek word for hang is κρέμαμαι; κρεμάννυμι is used of physical hanging. A millstone is hung around the neck (Matt 18:6). Jesus is hung from a cross (Luke 23:39; Gal 3:13). The intention here is that the loving God and the neighbor provide the structural support for the Scriptures. Love is prior to the Scriptures and provides them with both their form and content. See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida eds., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, Second Edition, Vol. I: Introduction and Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 221.

⁴¹ Love in Wesley's thought is sanctification, which is more important than faith: "... faith itself, even Christian faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of the operation of God, still is only the handmaiden of love. As glorious and honorable as it is, it is not the end of the commandment. God hath given this honor to love alone." John Wesley, "The Law Established Through Faith," *The Nature of Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 19&3), 73-74, Sermon 36.

⁴² Donald W. Dayton argues that by making sanctification the central theme of theology, Wesley actually returns to Catholicism. Agreed! "Law and Gospel in Wesleyan Tradition," Grace Theological Journal, 12 (Fall 1991): 235.

only creates Pharisees.43

The term "loving" describes the emotional intensity with which one believes and trusts in God and helps the neighbor. Love of God requires all your heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22.37). These are not parts of a person but different descriptions of the inward self. Faith is never partial but complete and total. The God who by his demand for love creates that love is not anonymous; He is the God who raises from the dead (Matt 22:23-28) and comes as the Son of David (Matt 22:41-46). Loving God is nothing else than trusting in the God who reveals himself in Jesus, whom the church confesses in the creed and approaches in the Lord's Prayer. In loving the neighbor, the believer places him on the same level of importance as himself. Love that esteems the other person higher than oneself can only be divine and, in its perfect form, exists first in the God who begets and sends the Son. By that love God makes man his neighbor and provides the source and pattern for our loving him and our neighbor. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Christians put themselves at risk for the neighbor and so they become reflections of Christ, "who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven . . ." and "was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate." Here is the heavenly Samaritan who risks his life for stricken pilgrims. What Jesus requires of us, he himself does (Luke 10:25-37).44 The command that we should also do as he did is not law, but a description of what the Christian in Christ actually is and does. Or better, it is what Christ is doing in us. Strange as it might seem, Jesus is lived under the third use of the law — the third use in the flesh. In the words of St. Paul, Christ is our sanctification.

Jesus identified love of God and neighbor not only as the law's greatest commandments, but also as the ones into which the whole law is assumed. The law

⁴³ Wesley's much publicized conversion by reading Luther's Commentary on the Romans hides his dislike for the Reformer's opinion on reason and law. Wesley writes in in his journal on 15 June 1741: "How does he (almost in the words of Tauler) decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable enemy to the Gospel of Christ . . . blasphemously does [Luther] speak of good works — and the Law of God; constantly coupling the Law with sin, death, hell, or the Devil! teaching that Christ delivers us from all alike;" quoted in Dayton, "Law and Gospel in Wesleyan Tradition," 237.

⁴⁴ Luke places the commands of loving God and the neighbor in the context of a lawyer asking Jesus about eternal life (10:29-37). When Jesus asks about the great commandments, the lawyer correctly responds: loving God and neighbor. Problematic for the lawyer is not the formulation of the faith in loving God and the neighbor, but the identification of the neighbor as the Good Samaritan. He is "the one who showed mercy on him." Jesus does not leave the conclusion up to the lawyer's good will, but requires similar behavior: "Go and do likewise." In a similar but not identical section in Matthew (22:34-40), Jesus identifies loving God and the neighbor as the chief commandments. Luke's pericope (10:29-37) resembles the one of the rich young man in all three synoptic gospels (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 1037-22; Luke 18:18-23) because Jesus requires the interrogator to do something. The lawyer must show mercy to the stricken and the rich young man must give to the poor. A key in joining the pericopes of the lawyer of Luke 10:29-37 to the rich young man of Matthew 19:16-23 is what each must do. The lawyer must show mercy (Luke) and the rich young must be perfect (Matthew). This follows the pattern of Matthew 5:48 where the command to be perfect corresponds to the command to be merciful in Luke 6:38. God's perfection is his mercy. This quality - perfection or mercy - is required for believers (third use of the law). All three qualities - mercy, love, and perfection - originate in God and are found in believers (third use of the law). Perfection in Matthew does not mean moral perfection, although the idea of course is included, but contentment and satisfaction. God is satisfied with the world through the atonement and exacts no punishment but does good. So, Christians as children of God do the same (third use of the law).

in all its functions determines relationships between men with God and with each other. By assuming the entire law into love, Jesus showed that the law, in its first and final form, has no negatives. Love as the content of the law (Scriptures) is not a matter of arbitrary divine choice but reflects what God really is. In requiring love of us, God only asks us to become like him.⁴⁵ God loves the neighbor whom we are commanded to love. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loves us, so we ought to love one another" (1 John 4:lo-11).

V. ELERT ON LAW AND GOSPEL

In reaction to Karl Barth's placement of the law after the gospel, Werner Elert went on to deny the third use of the law.⁴⁶ In analyzing Barth's inversion, Gerhard Forde surveys the German response to both theologians.⁴⁷ Elert remained in Lutheran bonds for his criticism that Barth did not keep the law and the gospel distinct. In Helmut Gollwitz's opinion,

Elert starts from the false presupposition that wrath, judgment, and punishment have an eternal Law of retribution as their basis to have any validity. This would mean that God is wrathful because He is a God of Law, and if this is followed to its logical conclusion it would have to mean that Law of retribution is the fundamental standard by which man's relationship is regulated, and that it was given before and not after the fall as the original form of man's relationship between God and man was not one of love, therefore that the Gospel could not be the reestablishment of the original relationship.⁴⁸

Gollwitz is right! In Lutheran theology the law's primary purpose is to reveal man's wretched condition (SA III, 2, 4), but the tension exists in man and not in God, whose nature is love. Making law, wrath, and vengeance part of God's essence before the fall contradicts his love, and also might make it difficult to distinguish Elert's position from Calvin's, where hate and love exist side by side in God. As we have said elsewhere, law and gospel cannot be read back into God in the same way.

⁴⁵ Louw and Nida note that while law (νόμος) carries the sanctions of society, commandment (ἐντολή) carries only the sanctions of the one issuing it. In submitting itself to God's command, Israel agrees to accept laws; Greek-English Lexicon, Vol. I, 425. The commands to love God and neighbor are over-arching principles. Laws can differ according to specific circumstances. In the section on terminology, it was discussed how the word law can be used of the Scriptures and even the gospel itself. There is good reason for law to be equated in every instance with reason to conclude that command (ἐντολή) not commandments, that is, prohibitions and threats. In Matthew 28:20 where the verb is used, "teaching them to keep all things whatsoever I have commanded," the reference is to the teachings of Jesus in which the gospel predominates. In Matthew 5:19, with its warning about breaking "the least of these commandments," the reference seems to be not to the Ten Commandments but rather to the Old Testament Scriptures, which Jesus has come to fulfill (vv.17-18).

⁴⁶ Werner Elert, Law and Gospel, Facet Books: Social Ethics Series, tr. Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 38-43.

⁴⁷ Gerhard O. Forde, The Law Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of its Historical Development (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969).

⁴⁸ Helmut Gollwitz, "Zur Einheit von Gesetz und Evangelium," Antwort (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag. 1956),303, quoted in Forde, The Law-Gospel Debate, 152-153.

VI. Gospel Over Law: A Resolution in Pieper

If there ever was a theologian of the gospel, it was Francis Pieper, who never tired of saying that the gospel is a word of God superior to the law.⁴⁹ This forced him to wrestle with how contradictory words could both claim to be God's word. The dilemma was a *crux theologorum*, a question which theologians are incapable of answering.⁵⁰ His argument is taken over from the one offered on election. This matter first appeared at the beginning of his first volume, thus it was not an incidental matter for him. He denied the claims of both the Calvinists, that the Gospel was not universally intended, and of the synergists, that man's response determined God's attitude.⁵¹ Eventually, the synergists have little use for God at all, since man's will has taken the place of God's.

Pieper opposed any attempt to set down a higher principle from which both law and gospel are derived.⁵² The Reformed and more recently Karl Barth have resolved the difference in favor of the law. Universalism resolves this in favor of the gospel. Though Pieper offers a disclaimer in looking for a higher principle, he does point to the gospel by describing it as a higher word of God. God is doing what he really wants to do in the gospel, while in the law he is doing only what he has to do. An answer is already present in the definition of law as *opus alienum*, God's foreign or strange work.⁵³ Condemnation and threat no longer belong to his essence. Gospel is never the *opus alienum*. This is basic to any doctrine of universal atonement and objective justification. Claiming that God still counts sin against the world denies both the atonement and justification. By Christ's atonement all mankind appears to God as righteous. This is the presupposition for the gospel, which the synergists do not recognize.⁵⁴

The gospel informs man of something that has already happened and not something that is happening when the message is heard. In subjective justification "the Gospel, however, pronounces the unrighteous man righteous," but subjective justification has no life of its own; it makes objective justification personal, which is only a facet of the universal atonement.⁵⁵ Whoever denies objective justification reduces justification to the act of believing and does not believe in it at all. Logically, he denies the atonement and preaches that man is responsible for his sins. Such a person preaches salvation by the law, *opinio legis*.

Pieper recognizes that the discussion on the law and the gospel is really about justification. "The Christian doctrine of justification is virtually identical with the discrimination of the Law and the Gospel. Moreover, the elimination of the Law from the article of justification must be absolute." The judgment of all unrighteousness

⁴⁹ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:232.

⁵⁰ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:249-250.

⁵¹ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:247-249.

⁵² Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:249-250.

⁵³ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:235.

⁵⁴ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:248-249

⁵⁵ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:229

⁵⁶ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:244; emphasis mine.

has taken place in the cross. For the hearer, God's condemnation of the world comes to him in the law. From this Pieper consistently and logically makes the gospel God's important and final word.⁵⁷ In order to keep the gospel free of condemnation, a characteristic that belongs to the law, he sees unbelief as sin against the law.⁵⁸ This view is not without difficulty because it makes the law the last or eschatological word of God in the judgment. This means that for unbelievers God reinstates the law. This would nullify the atonement and deny objective justification; however, these are fixed realities with God. If they were not, Christ would lose his place of prominence as the all-in-all. The answer to this dilemma lies in seeing unbelief as not one sin among others, but the final sin (and in a sense the only sin) by which the unbeliever cuts himself off from salvation. Pieper makes this clear in his locus on "Eternal Election," especially the section "No Election of Wrath or Predestination to Damnation." 59 For example, "the unbelief of the obdurate Jews is not traced to a predestination to unbelief or damnation, but to their opposition to the earnest and efficacious gracious will of God in the Word..."60 Their sins, especially their external ones, serve on the last day as evidence of their unbelief, their rejection of God's gracious invitation in the gospel. God's final verdict on them only confirms the path they have chosen for themselves. The world which does not believe is convicted by the Spirit because of this unbelief (John 16:9).61

⁵⁷ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:226.

⁵⁸ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:233-234.

⁵⁹ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:494-501.

⁶⁰ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3:495.

⁶¹ Here Raymond E. Brown provides clarification. "The first element (vs. 9) in the Paraclete's forensic activity is to prove to the disciples that the world is guilty of sin the basic sin which consists in refusing to believe in Jesus. .

The Paraclete will focus on the expression of disbelief that culminated in putting Jesus to death, but those who are guilty are a much wider group than the participants in the historical trial of Jesus. Those participants are only the forebears of men in every generation who will be hostile to Jesus." The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI, The Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 712. This is the greatest sadness, since they were included both in the atonement and the gospel's invitation.



WALTHER, THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW, AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

(July/October 2011)

Walther, the Third Use of the Law, and Contemporary Issues

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CARL Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther's 24 theses on the law and the gospel do not easily lend themselves to a developed doctrine on the third use of the law — an insight already made by Scott R. Murray. Werner Elert and Gerhard Forde proposed that the third use of the law outlined in Article VI of the Formula of Concord was not held by Luther and hence had no place in Lutheran theology.² Confusing the Reformed view that law in its third use prods the regenerate to do good works with that of the Formula may be one reason for its rejection. For Walther, the Reformed position of applying the law to produce good works is a confusion of law and gospel. Which is what his theses are all about.3 Since Article VI has to do with the law in all three uses. especially the second or accusatory function, it might be better entitled "The Three Uses of the Law." Article VI is really an extension of Article IV, "Good Works" and Article V, "Concerning Law and Gospel." According to Article VI, good works flow from a free and merry spirit meeting the law's specification (17, 23), but at the base of the article is the Lutheran anthropology that the believer is more sinner than saint and hence it speaks of the law's second use: that the sinful flesh needs to be threatened and compelled by the law (9, 18-20).4 Christians, as believers, are driven by the Spirit of Christ to do good according to the law of Christ, that is, the gospel (17). Apart from a reference to the Spirit of Christ, a Christological component is missing. Through the law has three functions, it has only one meaning as "the unchanging will of God, according to which human beings are to conduct themselves in this life" (15). So, the law's first and third functions result in the same outward behavior in the performance of good works (16), with the proviso that deeds done according to the first use are driven by fear of the law's penalties and the desire for reward. Good works done according to the third use come from the Spirit. First and second uses of the law resemble each

¹ Scott R. Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 25-26.

² For a fuller discussion, see Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 26-30. This position has been convincingly rebutted by Ed Engelbrecht, "Luther's Threefold Use of the Law," CTQ 75 (2011): 135-150.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible, ed. Charles P. Schaum, John P. Hellwege Jr., and Thomas E. Manteufel; tr. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 5. "Thesis XXIII. You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel God in the Word of God . . . if you use commands of the Law — rather than the admonitions of the Gospel — to urge the regenerate to do good." Walther's lectures on the law and the gospel were given from September 12, 1884 to November 6, 1885. A German edition was published in 1901, an English edition in 1929, ed. W.H.T. Dau, and condensed editions under the title God's No and God's Yes: The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel, cond. Walter C. Pieper (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973, 1981).

⁴ The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, tr. Charles Arand et at (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). References in the sentences are to the paragraphs in Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.

other in that failure results in penalties. Caught between the Reformed position that the third use is a reimposition of the law's threats in how the believer lives as a believer and the Lutheran concentration on the second use, some theologians have found good reason to deny the third use altogether. This is exacerbated by a less than fully defined third use of the law in the Formula, a matter addressed below.

The Law-Gospel paradigm by which Lutheran theology is usually defined and the Formula's lack of a fully developed definition of the third use may have provided a basis among some Lutherans for ordaining women and, more recently, homosexuals. Should any regulations or prohibitions about these matters be identified in the Scriptures, they would be superseded by the gospel, or so the argument goes. A less than fully developed doctrine of the third use in the Formula and Lutheran theology in general is rooted in the Lutheran concentration on original sin from which even in doing good works believers remain sinners. In spite of their faith in Christ, believers are constantly going back to square one. So pervasive is the reality of sin that discussion on the third use with its positive aspects soon reverts to the second use. Gilbert Meilaender addresses this Lutheran dilemma:

If I am an inattentive, thoughtless, or even abusive husband and father — and my neighbor is just the opposite, an exemplary husband and father — what Lutheranism too often has to say to us is exactly the same: that before God we are sinners in need of justifying grace. And if I want help to become more like my exemplary neighbor, the message is likely to be precisely the same: that I am sinner in need of grace. All of which is, of course, true. But it is not the only theological truth, nor the one that always best suits our condition. A theology that has learned to speak in such a monotone about grace-always as pardon but not also as power-gives no guidance or direction to the serious Christian. The Christian life, engaged only in instant return to pardoning word, goes nowhere.⁵

Walther's Law and Gospel informs classical Lutheran homiletical tradition that law and gospel are diametrically opposed to each other. Law not only serves but virtually exhausts its purpose in condemning sinners in preparation for hearing the gospel.⁶ His theses do not develop the law's positive aspect in providing specific guidance in how Christians are to live. He speaks of renewal and love, but only in the sense that they along with faith are not causes of one's salvation. A third use of the law may be implied in Walther's exegesis of Romans 3 and 4 in which he says that first the law threatens with the wrath of God and then the gospel announces the comforting promises of God. Then he adds, "This is followed by instruction regarding the things we are to do after becoming new people," but he does not elucidate what these things are.

Walther regards law as divine threat and gospel as divine comfort, definitions that

⁵ Gilbert Meileander, "The Catholic I Am," First Things 210 (February 2011): 29.

⁶ Walther, Law and Gospel, 1-8.

⁷ Walther, Law and Gospel. In more theological terms he writes "Genuine Sanctification follows justification and genuine justification comes after repentance." Emphasis original.

serve his ultimate purpose in showing that the two are not to be commingled. Believers converted by the gospel are not to be burdened with other requirements. Walther's concentration on the second use reflects Reformation thought, but he probably was also reacting to Rationalism with its positive appraisal of man's moral capabilities in which the law's accusatory function no longer was prominent. Within the context of 18th century Europe, the church as a *Volkeskirche* was coextensive with the state and so in practice the first and third uses of the law became virtually indistinguishable. Walther's experience with Pietism may have been more significant for his not providing an explicit discussion of the law's third use. After faith was created, Pietists reinserted regulations into Christian life, while the Reformed saw law as goading Christians to good works. For Walther, the gospel was God's last word, but ironically this idea, that was given legs by Werner Elert and Robert Schulz in the 20th century, provided a basis for the view that the Law was not applicable in Christian life. Apart from the question of whether Walther's theology was abused, an abridged edition of his Law and Gospel appeared as God's No and God's Yes, a title suggesting that law and gospel are two incompatible revelations of God. Compared to promises of the gospel with no conditions attached, law with its conditions, prohibitions and condemnations comes across as one big "NO." This characterization is so persuasive that many a Lutheran sermon predictably closes with an executive pardon for all transgressions.

A discussion on the law in its three uses would have remained the purview of the theologians had it not been for decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) that were based on the Law-Gospel paradigm that the gospel is God's last word — though it should be quickly added that recent events would have taken place even without theological arguments. False doctrine is not as easily recognized as aberrant practice, and reactions to the ELCA's decisions prove the point. Trinitarian issues have surfaced along with these decisions. Much trinitarian discussion is so abstract as to remain beyond the interest of many clergy and the grasp of the laity, but the introduction of an alternate form of the Lord's Prayer addressing God as Mother could not pass unnoticed, even by those who worship infrequently. At this point theology kicks in. If the first person of the Trinity can be known as Mother, then child can be substituted for Son and, we ask, why could the second person of the Trinity not be known as the daughter? In use already is the trinitarian alternative of Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier that allows for the ancient heresy of Modalism.

For those who lived through discussions leading up to the introduction of women clergy persons in the 1970s, recent ELCA decisions are a *deja vu* experience — been there, seen that, heard that. Then as now, arguments center around two fulcra. First, Old and New Testament citations, traditionally understood as disallowing these recently approved behaviors, are reinterpreted. Second, even if traditional prohibitions are acknowledged as correct interpretations of the disputed passages, they have been abrogated by the gospel. Gospel is God's last word, and law has outlived its purpose.

⁸ Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 26, goes as far as saying that "Walther's work set the agenda for discussion of Law and Gospel in America until the present."

This argument is a form of dispensationalism, though it is rarely recognized as such. Arguments for ordaining women in the 1970s were more diverse and prolonged than those for ordaining practicing homosexuals. In one moment, it was proposed and another accepted, or so it seems. Since regularizing the ordination of women, officially sponsored ELCA discussions on the matter have ceased. Ordination of homosexuals is already incontestable practice matching incontestable dogma. These disruptive controversies might show that while Lutherans were absorbed with the law's second or accusatory function, they should have been examining the law's third use in its application to the private and corporate lives of Christians.

Since its formation, the ELCA has moved away from its Lutheran heritage by establishing fellowship with the Reformed, Episcopalians, Moravians, and Methodists and has signed an accord on justification with the Catholics. Female theological students are approaching a majority in the ELCA. Homosexual unions can be given marriage blessings. During the radicalization of church practice, a sense of what it means to be Lutheran amazingly remains and has given birth to protest movements calling for reform and the formation of new synods. A revival of the Lutheran spirit was evident in a gathering at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, opposite the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, on the afternoon of Sunday, October 17, 2010. The speaker was Paul L. Spring, former bishop of one of the ELCA's geographic synods in Pennsylvania, and interim bishop of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). Objections raised there to the recent ELCA decisions might be described as intuitive rather than theological. One lady expressed dismay at allowing divorced persons to remain as pastors. A lay person asked for the definition of the word "orthodox," a question unlikely to be raised at similar LCMS gatherings. One pastor asked whether natural law could be taught at the seminaries, a question with profound theological significance. They were groping for reasons to counter the newer practices. Most clergy are patient with deviations in practice and doctrine, but it is another matter when an entire church body regularizes a deviation. Regularized deviations in practices in the ELCA bring to the surface doctrinal aberrations that would have otherwise remain unnoticed. In Bishop Spring's opinion, ELCA decisions to ordain practicing homosexuals were motivated more by cultural fluctuations than by agreed upon biblical conclusions. He did not mention that cultural forces were at work decision to ordain women in the 1970s. In both cases, the goals of ordaining women and homosexuals were in view by their proponents before and apart from the retrieval of biblical evidences and catholic practice.

Decisions and the ensuing discussions about ordaining women in the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the major constituting churches of the ELCA, can best be explained by the cultural climate of the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment to the American constitution. Rights that women had in society were seen as rights they also had in the church. Voila,

⁹ Giving the primacy to the gospel may lead to this absurd opinion that homosexual behavior is allowed for those who find themselves under the gospel but not for those under the law.

ordained women pastors. A malformed understanding of the universal priesthood of believers served this agenda well, as did the Law-Gospel paradigm in which the gospel as God's last word trumped the law. Recent decisions reflect and correspond to current cultural values expressed in judicial, legislative, and executive actions allowing gays to enter into contractual unions, marry, and serve openly in military. When the church absorbs the prevailing culture into its practices and then adjusts its theology to justify these practices, the church becomes so undistinguishable from society that it is no longer recognizable as church, a point Bishop Spring made in his lecture. Friedrich Schleiermacher constructed a form of Christianity from the German culture of the early 19th century. American churches may be constructing a religion out of the standards of Western culture but without historic Christian components that were still available in the early 19th German culture. Also lacking today is a noteworthy theologian like Schleiermacher. Present innovations look for support in the Law-Gospel paradigm that characterizes Lutheranism and the denial by some Lutheran scholars of the law's third use. These two things converge.

So, we go back to the question of what role the third use had for Walther. His *Pastoral Theology* sets down standards for pastoral conduct and procedures for exercising discipline. Christians not living up to church standards could be expelled from the congregation. This looks like law but perhaps not in its third function. Walther's edition of Baier's *Compendium* offers no section on the third use, but a definition may be extracted from the section on sanctification. Good works are described as spontaneous, an argument advanced in Article IV of the Formula on good works, but not in Article VI on the third use. For Walther, justification precedes sanctification, the life of good works, but it is precisely in the discussion of sanctification where the law's third use has a place. Current confusion about the third use may have been tempered, if it had been combined with the Formula's article on good works and the sections of Lutheran dogmatics on sanctification.

Ordination of women and homosexuals, practices that find precedence in ancient Gnosticism and not early church catholicism, were taking place in the Episcopal Church and the ELCA before either church legitimated them. Arguments offered for these changes were not without biblical support, but the prevailing one offered by Lutherans was that the gospel is God's last word. Hence any prohibitions concerning such behaviors are no longer applicable. Even though the Law-Gospel paradigm as articulated by Walther and Elert was not intended to support these practices, it did. Call it unintended consequences, a phrase that is eminently useful in theological discussion. This interpretation of the Law-Gospel paradigm in which the gospel has

¹⁰ C.F.W. Walther, Americanish-Lutlzerishe Pastoraltheologie, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), 338-354. American Lutheran Pastoral Theology, tr. and abr. John Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), esp. 247-25L

¹¹ Chapter VI, "De Renovatione et Bonis Operibus," Compendium, 299-336.

¹² Johann Wilhelm Baier, Compendium Theologie Positivae, ed. C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherishe Concordia Verlag, 1879), 330.

the last word finds collateral support in the now widely held view that Luther did not hold to the law's third use. This has proved to be a recipe for ethical disaster and ecclesiastical collapse. Yes, the law, depending on the circumstances, can be divided into functions, but there is only one law.

Hence, an abrogation in one function of the law contributes to or reflects a parallel malfunction in the other two. Practitioners and supporters of homosexual behavior no longer have to face the law's accusations from the pulpit They are no longer called to repentance and then faith. Confession in the confessional booth is adjusted by abridgment to the new standards. Only at one's own risk does a person of a church allowing women and homosexual preachers and the blessing of same sex marriage preach against these practices. He will inevitably run afoul of church officials and comprise his political future. In the state-affiliated churches of Scandinavia, some pastors have already been subject to ecclesiastical censure and civil penalties. In regard to the law's first use, ELCA decisions are in line with what is allowed by governments of countries in the West and, in a kind of perverse way, demonstrates the Formula's view that the law in its first and third uses results in or at least allows the same behaviors. This is not the case in Islamic countries and African countries with significant Christian populations, where such behaviors are frowned upon and have led some Lutheran churches to contemplate breaking communion with the ELCA. Compared to Roman Catholics and the Reformed, Lutherans are less politically active, but this may prove to our detriment. What is allowed under civil law, the law's first use, becomes more easily accepted under the third use and so redefines the doctrine of Christian sanctification.

Seeing things in historical perspective helps. Saxon and Bavarian Lutherans, who arrived first into the Midwest in the 1830s, understood that the Rationalist and Pietist theologies from which they fled found a poor sister in the Lutheranism that sprang up a century before in colonial Pennsylvania and New York. Early American Lutheranism had multi-varied roots in Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism and was soon overcome by German Rationalism with an assist from New England Congregationalism, which turned into the Unitarianism of Harvard where the president of The New York Synod Frederick Quitman had studied. The contagion of revivalism that loomed up in Jonathan Edward's New England and was advanced in the Methodism of George Whitefield found its way on to the prairies where the new arrivals were settling. All this was brought together by Samuel S. Schmucker's American Recension of the Augsburg Confession. To make sure that they were not trading European products for inferior American ones, leaders of the Lutheran immigration established their own synods, among which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) still survives.

Jumping out of the devouring flames of European Rationalism into the American Protestant frying pan was not an option for the LCMS's fathers, and so the lines were quickly and sharply drawn between established Lutheranism and the bourgeoning Lutheranism of the plains. Had the older American Lutheranism found entrance among the arrived immigrants, they would have one devil to meet another

one with duller, less theologically honed horns. Zion on the Mississippi had to resist being overwhelmed by the the waters that flowed from the Hudson, Delaware, and Susquehanna westward over the Appalachians to the Midwestern prairies. Zion's inhabitants sandbagged their fortress on the Mississippi against eastern floods (Is 8:6-8). In this complex of metaphors lurks a composite parable that scientific principles are not hardwired. Take for example the principle that all rivers flow downward. This might be true, unless it was Fort Wayne in March of 1982, when the waters of the St. Joe River met the swift flowing waters of the St. Joe River coming from the south and the St. Joe began to flow upstream. If commonly accepted principles are open to reevaluation, then so are common theological assumptions. Perhaps theological influences can flow in unexpected directions. Thus, influences flowing from Missouri's Zion on the Mississippi could reverse course and flow north into ELCA seminaries. Well, according to Carl E. Braaten, this is what happened, and details are provided in his *Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Theologian.*

For years Braaten, along with his co-editor Robert W. Jensen of the *Christian Dogmatics*, has been called to task for holding a little less than authentic Lutheran theology, but he turns the tables around in attributing ELCA problems to LCMS blue bloods. Waters from the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, channeled through Christ Seminary in Exile, Seminex, flowed upstream to Chicago in 1982 when the former Saint Louis faculty from Seminex joined, and then took control of, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (LSTC). Braaten relates how ten former Seminex professors voted as a block to bring down the existing faculty structure and administration. Having taken the top faculty positions for themselves at LSTC, they put in place the egalitarian model of Concordia Seminary's administration of John H. Tietjen in which "secretaries, janitors, and kitchen help" were included in faculty social gatherings. This was more than a political maneuver, but in Braaten's opinion theological antinomianism was at work. "The theology that backed up the 'paradigm shift' at LTSC was antinomian or a close relative." All this laid on the shoulders of former LCMS clergy who found their way into his church."

The unexpected consequence of such a strong contingency of Seminex personnel was to move the faculty and student body to the left on social, cultural, and theological issues. Having been condemned as liberals and heretics in their home church, they became advocates of an agenda in their new ecclesial setting. The poison of political correctness spread into every aspect of seminary life.¹⁵

Braaten takes it a step further in these actions as the core of the resolutions adopted by the August 2009 ELCA convention regularizing the ordination of gays and the blessing of their unions as marriage. Tietjen anticipated this as the role of

¹³ Carl E. Braaten, Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Theologian (Grand Rapids. Wm. B. Eardmans Publishing Co., 2010). 118-122.

¹⁴ Braaten, Because of Christ, 120-121.

¹⁵ Braaten, Because of Christ, 120.

his faculty.¹⁶ Braaten is not the only one pointing the finger at the LCMS for ELCA problems. At his October 17, 2010 presentation, Bishop Spring located the cause of what he called the antinomianism in the ELCA in "Gospel reductionism" and commended J.A.O. Preus for recognizing it for what it really was.¹⁷ Gospel reductionism extends the Law-Gospel paradigm used in preaching, especially as it was set forth by Walther, into biblical interpretation in providing the only required meaning of a biblical text. If the biblical text births law and gospel, everything else in the text is up for grabs.¹⁸

The subtitle of Walther's Law and Gospel, *How to Read and Apply the Bible* implied that law and gospel was more than a preaching technique, but that it was a hermeneutical one also, and so it was taken. For self-styled confessional minded preachers, the core meaning of a biblical passage is exhausted if, after bringing the people to their knees, they are lifted up by the gospel. In certain and perhaps most cases, the imposition of the principle curtails rather than helps determine what was on the mind of the inspired writer. Walther did not preach like this, as is obvious from his robust engagement with the biblical texts, but the Law-Gospel principle came to form the basis of "Gospel reductionism." Preach law and gospel and the preacher has license to say whatever he or she wants about the biblical text. *How to Read and the Apply the Bible* said too much about Walther's book or, for that matter, any book. The next step is that ethical matters are up for grabs.

Applied unilaterally, "Gospel reductionism" results in antinomianism, as both Bishop Spring and Carl Braaten observe, and compromises the law in all three functions. Bishop Spring said that culture and not Scripture is determining the ELCA's agenda. Meilaender speaks of "Lutheranism's decline into antinomianism." In the mores of society a century ago, mainline churches had no thought of ordaining women. This was something Pentecostal churches did. Two generations ago, the blessing of a gay marriage was unheard of. Had the culture not lost its moral bearings, what is understood as the first use of the law, problems now affecting church life, matters of the law's third use, would not have arisen. When the sense of right and wrong binding a society together is eroded, it becomes difficult for the church to bring people to an awareness of their sin in preparation for the gospel. Reformed theologian Michael Horton has said that if the church does not change culture, culture will change the church, a theme constantly reappearing in *First Things*. Though the task of improving the culture has more of a place in Calvinism, culture has changed the church and we are suffering the consequences.

After his lecture, Bishop Spring told a circle of people gathered around him that current ELCA problems were traceable to those LCMS clergy who, as members of

¹⁶ John H. Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990), 299.

¹⁷ Spring attributed the phrase to the late LCMS president Jacob Preus, though its popularity can be traced to John Warwick Montgomery's series of lectures entitled "Law/Gospel reductionism" and came to be know in it's abbreviated form as "Gospel reductionism." See Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 103

¹⁸ Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 103, 215.

¹⁹ Meilaender, "The Catholic I Am," 30.

the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), were later involved in the formation of the ELCA, the same point Braaten makes in his autobiography.²⁰ When two points are located on the circumference of a circle, the center can be located. Spring and Braaten serve as those points and the lines to the center converge on the LCMS; particularly gospel reductionism as it emerged from the Law-Gospel paradigm. Along with the intrusion of a foreign theological element into the body politic, Bishop Spring pointed out that a merger of the LCA and the ALC may not have taken place without the persistent instigation of the dissident Missourians. At least this was the vision of Tietjen before the union of the three synods.²¹ Bishop Spring claims that, had a merger taken place without the one-time Missourians, the results would have been different. A bit of historical revisionism may be at play here, since already in 1972 the ALC had introduced the ordination of women and the LCA soon followed suit. Plans to ordain women without synod approval were already afoot at that time at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, under the Tietjen administration, so on this issue there was prior agreement. With one Lutheran church in view, a spirit of triumphalism may have overtaken the three uniting synods that did not allow them to recognize potentially disruptive practices. Matters among ELCA dissidents will be resolved only when they recognize that arguments used for the ordination of women were resurrected in regularizing homosexual clergy. Claims that emerging synods will be no different from the parent ELCA, except for disallowing homosexual clergy, overlooks the serious attention by their theologians being given to defining the law.

The antinomianism that surfaced in the August 2009 ELCA decisions was already at work in how the former Saint Louis faculty members were organizing the Chicago seminary. All were equal. Leaders in the egalitarian movement, as identified by Braaten, were Robert Bertram and Edward Schroeder, who are described as "founders of Crossings, an educational institution whose purpose was to relate the gospel to daily life. They followed Elert in rejecting the third use of the law." So, Murray's assessment that Elert's denial of the third use of the law was a factor in disruptions in American Lutheran theology is confirmed.²² Even if antinomianism cannot be laid at Elert's feet, his theology provided the soil for its growth.²³ The egalitarianism at work in organizing LSTC and later the ELCA was followed by libertarianism, which I suppose is a synonym

²⁰ Braaten, Because of Christ, 120.

²¹ Tietjen's vision of a union of the three synods is found in chapter 14 of his *Memoirs in Exile*, as the title, "A Yeast in Flour," suggests (289-315), and particularly in this sentence: "I had been wondering for some time if one purpose God may have had in mind for Seminex and the AELC was to serve as yeast for a larger Lutheran union" (299). He goes to recount a meeting with E. Clifford Nelson in which both men saw a recapitulation of the formation of the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood in the 19th century leading up to the union of all Norwegian Lutherans in the events later leading up to the formation of what would be organized as the ELCA.

²² Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 178-179.

²³ Reinhard Hauber argues that Elert was antinomian. "Werner Elert, Einfuehrung in Leben und Werk eines 'Lutheranismus,'" Neue Zeitschrift fuer Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie, vol 28 (1986), 113-146. Lowell C. Green refutes the allegation. The Erlangen School of Theology: Its History, Teaching and Practice (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 249. As Green points out "the order of creation must 'build upon the rules of nature as created by God."

for antinomianism. Braaten says that for the new line of thought to "offer any rules or restrictions regarding the sexual behavior of a Christian ... is to legalize the gospel, that is, to make the gospel of God's love and forgiveness what the law is designed to do."24 Braaten's vilification by the LCMS conservatives adds to the value of his appraisal. Spring's and Braaten's appraisal of the ELCA is confirmed by Letter #673 circulated by Edward Schroeder in which a certain Peter Keyel says that the Scriptures do not require any single understanding of marriage or codes for sexual behavior. Setting up sexual standards, in Keyel's opinion, sets aside faith and the gospel as the rule by which Christians live. One has to ask why gospel freedom is not applicable to the other commandments in the second table and only to the sixth, or perhaps it is? The fifth has already been infringed upon by ELCA insurance plans funding abortions, an action probably taken without recourse to theological argumentation. Then there is the Eighth Commandment. ELCA officers have made unkind remarks about those who take exception to the new measures.²⁵ After his lecture Bishop Spring said, "We live in interesting times." Agreed! Rightly or wrongly, the LCMS is being held responsible, at least partially, for another church's problems. Waters do some times flow upstream.

Systematic theology serves to clarify church doctrine, but at times its structures may be too restrictive. This may have been the case with the second use having monopolized the definition of the law so that ignoring the third use of the law allowed for its denial. A solution might be found in expanding the definition of the third use in seeing it as a replication of what the law was in the paradise of Genesis 2 and then fast forwarding into the paradise of the end time. What Adam did by nature corresponded to what God required. For him, imperative and indicative were one thing. Interrogative was the grammatical form of the serpent. Adam's offense was not merely the abrogation of this or that commandment, but in his attempt to take the place of his creator, his was an act of "unfaith," if we dare speak like this. He believed the promise of the serpent's gospel that he and his wife would be like gods and soon discovered that Satan is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Adam inverted the image of God in which he was created so that he and not God defined the relationship between them. In those fleeting moments when we love God and the neighbor more than we do ourselves, the paradise understanding of the law reemerges as flickers of light in an otherwise dark place in which the law accuses us. Just as the third use of the law allows for a brief, temporary and sporadic return to Paradise Lost, so it anticipates the final paradise when the second use of the law with the first use will pass away. Then the redeemed will no longer be confronted by the law's accusations and Moses will be seen with Christ as a redemptive figure. 26 From a cheerful and willing spirit, each will

²⁴ Braaten, Because of Christ, 121.

²⁵ Bishop Spring claims that the editor of The Lutheran, the official ELCA publication, called Spring and his group "a boil to be lanced" and "ludicrous." When asked to resign, Spring replied, "Hell's going to freeze over before I resign."

²⁶ Rev. 15:3 states, "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty."

live in harmony with God and his neighbor. At that time justification will no longer be forensic, a declaration that sins are forgiven, but it will be intrinsic. We will be made righteousness, as the etymology of the word justification suggests. Christ will completely envelop our existence. At that time a complete *theosis* will be realized.

In brief, the third use of the law is nothing else than sanctification that will in the resurrection reach and exceed the perfection of the first paradise. In the first paradise God was the lawgiver and in the final paradise he will be both lawgiver and fulfiller and so the law will be endowed with a greater magnificence. Not only will the law's prohibitions and penalties be forever silenced, but law shall be recognized as the perfect description of God. It will no longer be "God's No and God's Yes," but it will be God's Yes and God's Yes! All this is an anticipation of what will be and comes to life here when brothers and sisters live in peace with one other. We might discover that Luther's doctrine of vocation is nothing else but the application of third use of the law, because each performs the work assigned to him or her, a principle that Adam did not understand.

Recent ELCA decisions can be seen as offenses in the light of natural law and specific biblical prohibitions, but ultimately must be seen as offenses against Christ. Again, this leads to the conclusion that the most significant deficit in Lutheran definitions of the third use of the law is the Christological component. Current crises bring up the question whether the gospel is God's last word. Yes, perhaps in the sense that what Christ has done comes alive in the lives of Christians. Consider these words of Jesus, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). That's gospel and the third use altogether. Now, I am not so sure that the first and third uses of the law produce the same external results. At the end time the first and second uses of the law will pass away and only the third will remain. Maybe this is what Paul meant: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (2 Cor 13:13).



LUTHERAN CLICHÉS AS THEOLOGICAL SUBSTITUTES

(July/October 2014)

Lutheran Clichés as Theological Substitutes

JULY/OCTOBER 2014

FOR some time, I wrestled over whether this paper should be called "Lutheran Clichés as Theological Substitutes" or "Lutheran Distinctives as Theological Substitutes." This topic came to mind from attending meetings and hearing phrases that often appeared to be little more than a rehearsing of clichés pretending to be theology. Clichés have value. Use the proper one and membership in the guild is assured. It starts at the seminary as students take over the language of their instructors without really knowing what it means.

Like Jesus, the church has both divine and human natures. We believe in the church, as the creed says. Its divine origin and essence are revealed, not seen. A church's human side can be seen in its congregations, districts, and synods, which can be analyzed. One congregation or synod is not like another. Each has its own personality. A pastor leaving his first assignment for another soon learns that each congregation has its own DNA. A church's boundaries are set by commonly held beliefs, but its external character is shaped by family ties, ethnicity, similar vocations, geography, and a shared history. Thus, a church can be defined by its culture, that is, sociologically. About this Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher had something to say.¹ His definition may skirt the biblical understanding, but it does comport with the reality in which pastor and people confront each other. A community church's membership is determined more by place of residence than by faith, but even churches with confessions are in some sense community churches.

Any group can be recognized by the words and phrases frequently used by its members. A common discourse makes a group cohesive and intentionally or unintentionally serves as a barrier to nonmembers. So, congregations and synods are bound together by a common language or discourse that serves as their set of distinctives. Entrance into the community requires knowledge of the discourse. These observations are hardly profound and are as true for informal gatherings of retirees gathering for morning coffee, for example, as they are for professional associations of architects, physicians, attorneys, or clergy. Each guild has its distinctive discourse that is often as instinctive as it is cognitive. Terms can be used without attention to precise meaning. Certain phrases sound good, simply because they have been heard so often.

A Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor from northeastern Indiana claims that many LCMS congregations are not that distinct from congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).² While this observation is general enough to avoid serious challenge, a congregation-by-congregation survey might show

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackinto and J.S. Steward, 2 vols. (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 676–687.

^{2 &}quot;Matthew Becker Says That Many LCMS Congregations Look, Feel and Sound Like Many ELCA Congregations," Christian News 51 (November 25, 2013): 15. This was taken from the ALPB Forum blog of November 13, 2013.

that just the opposite is true. Though congregations in each synod may use the terms "justification" and "the priesthood of all believers" in their discourses, substituting gender neutral language in speaking of God and human beings has substantially altered the discourse in the ELCA so that congregations of one synod can be recognized as increasingly different from the other. Pastors in their persons are as much a part of community discourse as are the words they speak, perhaps more so. Thus, women clergy presiding at the altar and standing in the pulpit make visible the different discourses separating ELCA and LCMS congregations. Discourses that take place at an ELCA convention call for social justice, while increasingly those at an LCMS convention call for doctrinal unity.

One purpose in establishing any group is assuring unity of discourse, so that its members say the same thing. This is also true of political action groups. Someone calling for gun control would probably no longer be welcome in the National Rifle Association. That said, within the larger communities of discourses there are interest groups, each with its distinctive discourse. They do not represent opposing theologies but show how a group works towards what each considers the perfection of the church. Discourses at gatherings of individuals associated with Gottesdienst, Lutheran Concerns Association, the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations, and the Pastoral Leadership Institute are not interchangeable. Pastors and laity will gravitate to communities where the discourse is familiar. Dissatisfaction with discourse in the ELCA was a reason for the formation of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), which is still forming its own distinct discourse.³

Going from one discourse group to another presents its own problems. Non-Lutherans joining our congregations will be at a loss, for a time, as to what is happening in our services, but this is also the case in joining any community. Catechesis is nothing else than familiarization with the community discourse. Leaving one church for another requires commitment to a different belief system, the creedal or confessional aspect, but it also requires adjustment to the discourse of the new community, its cultural side. Lutherans converting to Catholicism may still think in Lutheran terms. Those brought up as Baptists and Methodists often do not get the hang of what being Lutheran means. Non-Jews who convert to Judaism are never really full members of that community. One is born a Jew, and the same holds true for Roman Catholics. Membership in religious communities is based not only on beliefs but also on a cultural substructure acquired through upbringing in the community. Old habits die slowly, if they die at all. Conversions may never be total. Every group has its own linguistic shorthand. Newly enrolled seminary students are often at sea for the first two terms until they familiarize themselves with the community discourse. Single words and short phrases substitute for fully developed concepts. For example, the Latin una sancta grammatically might mean a holy woman, but in its everyday use in theology it is shorthand for the church. Two-source and two-document theories of the origins of the Gospels are familiar to New Testament scholars but perhaps not even to those specializing in other areas of theology. Without knowing a community's shorthand, one is hard-pressed to know fully what is going on.

Defined discourse is not unique to Christianity. Masons are held together as a community by a discourse of secretive codes designed to keep nonmembers at bay. This is their form of closed communion. Pastors leaving one church tradition for another because of doctrinal reasons soon realize that their new affiliation is held together not only by common beliefs but by a distinctive discourse that is at first strange to them. Clergy leaving the LCMS in the 1970s, especially the older ones, were never really at home in the ELCA. By including the words "in exile" in naming their theological institution, "Christ Seminary in Exile" (abbreviated Seminex), the St. Louis seminary faculty majority saw themselves in exile from the mother church, hoping for a return to Zion. Those who switch their memberships between congregations of the LCMS and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod may not have anticipated that the members of these two conservative Lutheran bodies think differently. Members of the newly formed NALC may have separated themselves from the ELCA, but similarities remain. First loves are not forgotten. Even when community bonds are irreparably dissolved, the exiles still hope to pray next year in Jerusalem. Knives detaching the cultural umbilical cords rarely cut cleanly.

Hasidic Jews and the Amish are monolithic in discourse and appearance. The LCMS with its commitment to the Book of Concord and a shared history rooted in the Wilhem Löhe colonies in Michigan and Martin Stephan's Perry County experiment in Missouri is, in comparison to most Protestant groups, monolithic. Outsiders have a general idea that we are conservative, and members of one congregation are easily assimilated into another. Half a century or so ago, the LCMS was even closer to monolithic perfection, but for the most part we still are of one mind. In contrast, the ELCA, with diverse origins in multiple synods, some going back to the colonial period, possesses a built-in tolerance for diversity in its discourse. This diversity allowed for a less acrimonious parting of the ways in the formation of the NALC than what the LCMS experienced in the 1970s. A reverse action took place when LCMS members helped form the ELCA. Dissidents detached themselves from the LCMS discourse, but they carried with them the style of that LCMS discourse in how they imposed their agenda on the new church. They remained Missourians not in what they believed but in the intensity of that belief.

In spite of differences from one group to another within the LCMS, the overarching discourse holding us together remains similar from congregation to congregation. In hearing certain doctrinal expressions in our theology and sermons, we assure ourselves we are in the right community; common discourse necessary for the unity of community, however, does not come without its drawbacks. Through repetition, the chief determinative distinctives within the common discourse morph into clichés whose meaning is assumed. Clichés, or what we call Lutheran distinctives, take on a sacred character with diplomatic immunity from analysis. An all-time

favorite is the universal priesthood of believers that is substituted for the phrase "royal priesthood," which in 1 Peter 2:9 refers to the divine election of the church but is widely understood as a principle of congregational organization. Holding that some passages of the Bible are clearer than others, the *sedes doctrinae* is cliché and stands at odds with Luther who held that all Scriptures were clear. Arguably cliché is the Reformation principle *sola scriptura*. Clichés come and go. Now in vogue is "first-article Christianity," whose meaning is more often assumed than defined. Should it be defined, it would be hardly distinguishable from conservative eighteenth-century Unitarianism. Other clichés are "foretaste of the feast to come," the "word of promise," and "go in peace and serve the Lord."

Code words in a discourse serve as passwords for entrance into the community, even when they are not understood. After the controversies of the 1970s, such words as inspiration and inerrancy moved to the top of the list marking one as a conservative. Use the words and one gained entry into the community ascendant at that time, or so, at least, one colloquy candidate thought. To pass, the applicant answered every question with the word inerrancy, even when the questions had nothing to do with the Bible. This is an extreme example of a community's cliché detached not only from meaning but also the proper theological context. In most cases, code words or clichés surface in the appropriate environment but may still suffer from lack of meaning. Frequent repetition of key words and phrases in a community's discourse erodes meaning, and a community's distinctives devolve into clichés. Some distinctives can be negative, like expressing one's opposition to the higher critical method, even though one such method does not exist. At best it is an umbrella term for acceptable and unacceptable methods of biblical interpretation, but it is good to be against it.

For some time, I have toyed with idea of gathering clichés frequently used at church gatherings and publishing them for the benefit of those desiring to be more deeply involved in the community we call the LCMS. Their use would also help for advancement in the ranks. This is hardly a new idea. About a half century ago, a Methodist clergyman with tongue in cheek wrote *How to Become a Bishop without Being Religious*.⁴ It was once on the reading lists distributed by my colleague John T. Pless and recommended with good purpose. What passes as religious talk or theology is often little more than finding the right cliché. A reminder to pursue this compiling of LCMS clichés came with the publication of *The Tyranny of Clichés*, written by New York Times best-selling author Jonah Goldberg.⁵ Politicians thrive on such clichés as social justice, environmental concerns, political correctness, and fairness. Their meanings are assumed but not defined and, when defined, spawn several definitions. Asking about the meaning of a cliché exposes one as a neophyte.

Cliches, nevertheless, are not without their benefit. They provide the raw data for the discourse on which communities are built and the fuel for programs, be they

⁴ Charles Merrill Smith, How to Become a Bishop without Being Religious (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).

⁵ Jonah Goldberg, "The Tyranny of Clichés: What Does 'Social Justice' Mean?" National Review 64 (May 14, 2012): 30–32.

political, corporate, or churchly. In his lectures for his course on Lutheranism in America, Concordia Theological Seminary president Lawrence R. Rast Jr. rehearses some past LCMS programs that promised to set the world on fire. I wonder how many remember the synod evangelism program "Each One Reach One" and whether anyone knows what it meant or whether it worked. Meanings of clichés acquired through etymology are often not only wrong but annoying. You have heard that "synod" means walking together. No, it doesn't. It means coming together, an assembly. Left unsaid is that the one telling us this contrived meaning wants us to march to his drumbeat. Through repetition, clichés take on a life of their own and, should they survive, become sacred. Like a geometric theorem, the truthfulness of a cliché rests in itself and is immune from analysis. In dogmatics this is called *autopistia*, a proposition or belief that needs no analysis because it is true in itself, at least until someone tells the emperor to look around for his clothes.

C. S. Mann, author of a previous edition of the *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Mark and a one-time speaker at the Concordia Theological Seminary symposium, once gave me a type-written paper entitled "A Theological Firestorm." Lost for several years, it surfaced last spring in the storage boxes in the garage, and its discovery was welcomed with great joy. Described on the tattered paper—now photocopied for safe keeping—was the description of a fictitious meeting of representatives of various religions that was disrupted by a fire. The reaction by each group reflected its core self-understanding. For the Christian Scientists the fire was an illusion. Fundamentalists saw the fire as the wrath of God. Roman Catholics passed the collection basket for a rebuilding campaign. Congregationalists said, "Every man for himself." Methodists pondered the fire for its implications for the blessed assurance. The association of women clergy asked if the fire was gender neutral. Baptists were heard asking where the water was, and "the Episcopalians formed a procession and walked out singing a suitably lugubrious hymn." "The Lutherans decided that the fire was against either a) law, or b) the Gospel; and was in any event unlawful."

As trivial as this story is, it pinpoints what each group holds as essential, and this determines the character of that group's discourse. What Lutherans call the chief doctrine, i.e., justification, or as it is also called, the law and the gospel, defines the community discourse in regard to biblical interpretation and preaching and provides the standard for evaluating other doctrines. Attempts to understand the words of Jesus as eucharistic, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53), are refuted because only faith and not the Lord's Supper is required for salvation. Thus, an entire chapter that speaks of eating and drinking flesh and blood must be about faith, so Luther argued.

Not only is law and gospel the standard for interpreting the Bible, but it is used as an outline for preaching. This was recently the case with four students in a preaching competition. Each was given a pericope from a different Gospel, but each sermon followed the outline of the law first, followed by the gospel. In hearing that the conclusion for the second sermon was identical to the first, the listener knew

what to expect in the remaining two. In each case, the Lutheran distinctive of law and gospel took precedence over what each evangelist might have had in mind. It would be difficult to see how the Law-Gospel paradigm was a factor in how the evangelists composed their Gospels. Mark's ending of the women running from the tomb afraid hardly looks like gospel, at least according to the dogmatic definition. If there is a unifying principle, that principle is Christ, but each Gospel is unique in format, content, theological perspective, and conclusion. Law and gospel is not meant to be considered as a doctrine among others; rather, it shows how God works in the individual.⁶ It is neither a literary device nor a way of ranking the importance of doctrines.

Consider the case of the St. Louis faculty majority who in 1971 affirmed justification but were not able commit to the historical character of the virgin birth and the resurrection. With its affirmation of justification, the Fact Finding Committee wrote:

We praise and thank God that we can report that our church has been spared many of the theological aberrations that plague Christendom today. The Fact Finding Committee found no evidence that any professor at the seminary teaches false doctrine concerning such great doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, justification by faith, or the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, etc.8

In this sensitive situation, the committee had to be as generous as possible, but the report gives the impression, though it might not have been its intention, that the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and justification by faith can be held apart from affirming the historicity of Jesus, including the virgin birth, his miracles, and his resurrection. This raises the question whether the doctrine of justification should have precedence as the chief doctrine over the historical character of Jesus' incarnation, miracles, resurrection, or other events in his life. A church, even a Lutheran one, can survive as Christian with a false or inadequate definition of justification or no definition at all, but it cannot be the church if the historical character of Jesus and especially his resurrection are made optional. At least this is what Paul thought. Without the resurrection the Corinthians would still be in their sins (1 Cor 15:13-17). Resurrection was the doctrine on which justification depended. It was the prior doctrine and not the other way around. Justification is the goal and purpose of preaching and theology, not its beginning. If justification did not require belief in the resurrection of Jesus, then for some the gospel's freeing from the law became an argument for the ordination of women (Gal 3:23-29). In these two cases the chief doctrine became the only one.

The importance of law and gospel for the NALC was seen in its August 2012

⁶ See Hans-Peter Grosshans, "Lutheran Hermeneutics: An Outline," in *Transformative Reading of the Gospel of John*, ed. Kenneth Mtata (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2012), 23–46, esp. 36.

⁷ Non-Lutherans are also aware of our dependency on law and gospel. In meetings with the late Carl F.H. Henry and Kenneth Kantzer, the great Evangelical theologians of the last century, I was struck by how much they knew about law and gospel as the heart of Lutheran theology.

⁸ Paul A. Zimmerman, A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 225.

convention, at which non-Lutheran and Lutheran theologians lectured on the topic.9 Since non-Lutherans do not operate with this distinctive, reports that this multidenominational approach was less than fully successful were not surprising. Leave Lutherans to themselves and the discussion fares no better. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson begins her essay "Law and Gospel (With a Little Help from St. John)" with what she calls "five typical misreadings of law and gospel across Lutheran history." Add to this several competing definitions of justification in the LCMS and the every-five-year international Luther conference debates on how the reformer understood justification. Here is the irony: the distinctive determining the character of Lutheran discourse has no one meaning among those who insist on it, but it remains the one distinctive that holds Lutherans together. Cliché triumphs over substance, culture over doctrine."

Justification was for Luther the standard not only in dispensing a eucharistic understanding of John but also in determining the worth of the biblical books. Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, and the Gospel and first epistle of John formed his inner canon. Nevertheless, this did not deter him from preaching on Sundays from the appointed Gospels, of which Matthew and Luke had the lion's share. For his sermons he did not resort to the epistles that articulated for him and for Lutherans after him justification as the chief doctrine. Here is a conundrum. If we hold to the now widely-held scholarly view that the Gospels were written after the epistles, this raises the question of why Paul's doctrine of justification is not spelled out in the Gospels, or at least had little or no influence on them. If the reverse is true, that one or more of the Gospels were written first before the epistles, then the doctrine of justification was Paul's reflection on the narrative of the life and death of Jesus. Paul came to his doctrine of justification in his conflict with the Judaizers in Galatia, and then towards the end of his life he wrote his magnum opus on justification in his letter to the Romans.

Paul and Luther were alike in that their doctrines of justification came from their personal experiences (though they were different). What Paul said about justification

⁹ These essays were published in *Preaching and Teaching the Law and the Gospel of God*, ed. Carl Braaten (Dehli, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Books, 2013).

¹⁰ Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Law and Gospel (With a Little Help from St. John)," in "You Have the Words of Eternal Life": Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective, ed. Kenneth Mtata (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012), 84–92, esp. 85.

Justification was defined as the chief doctrine by Lutherans in the Reformation in their conflict with the papacy and, after the first article, was the subject of the remaining twenty-seven of the Augsburg Confession. This doctrine is what Lutherans are all about, but ironically it has become a doctrine over which Lutherans cannot agree among themselves. Disagreements surfaced even during Luther's lifetime and were resolved by the Formula of Concord, but that was not the end of it. At its 1963 Helsinki convention, the Lutheran World Federation could not come to an agreement on justification. Lutherans and Roman Catholics have disagreed more over justification than any other doctrine, so working to overcome age old differences was welcomed. However, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) became a cause of further dissension among Lutherans and dissatisfaction among Catholics.

¹² This was Luther's view. See *Martin Luther, Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 35:118 (hereafter AE).

came from his reflection on how he had persecuted the church (Gal 1:23). Luther's articulation sprang from an intense guilt of not fulfilling the law. For each, justification was a solution to a dilemma, but Paul's authority to formulate this doctrine came from his being made an apostle by God and Jesus whom God raised from the dead (Gal 1:1). Narrative about the historical event precedes justification and not the other way around, and so justification follows resurrection. This is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." Paul's hearers were justified not when they learned of the doctrine of justification but when they heard and believed about Christ's death for sins and resurrection.¹³ From my experience, Lutheran pastors find it hard to resist the temptation to superimpose Paul's doctrine of justification on the content and outline of the sermons based on the gospels. Attempts to find Paul's doctrine of justification in the gospels are unconvincing. Offered as one example is the account of the tax collector who returns to his home justified (Luke 18:10-14).14 Rather than Jesus explaining how God justifies through faith, he directs the hearers to the self-degrading posture of the tax collector who, in asking God for mercy, shows he is justified.15 While the conclusion of the account, "for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted," shows how the law destroyed the tax collector's self-esteem and how he was accepted or justified by God, at a deeper level the words describe Christ's humiliation in being accused by the law and his being rescued by God through his resurrection from the dead. Law and gospel in the life of the Christian correspond to Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Christology is the prior reality and justification is the subsequent one. Christology is the foundation and content of preaching and justification the result. Letting justification be detached from the historical component in Christology allowed the Fact Finding Committee to commend the St. Louis faculty majority for holding to justification in spite of their allowing doubts about the virgin birth and resurrection. Rather than seeing the Antichrist as the denier of justification, the term is better applied to those theologians who, since the Enlightenment, "do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (2 John 7).

Unquestionably, Lutheran distinctives are rooted in the books Luther favored. He writes,

Therefore, John's Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them. So too, the

¹³ Had Paul's opponents in Galatia not attributed salvation to works of the law, he may not have articulated justification then, but it would have happened sooner or later. By nature, man takes credit for who he is and what he does. Works righteousness adheres to our existence, so this doctrine would have to be spelled out. But for both Paul and Luther, circumstances in their lives were the cause for their articulation.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the different perspectives on justification, see David Morlan, "Luke and Paul on Repentance," in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts and Convergences*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joel Willitts (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 114–145.

¹⁵ For a discussion of how this parable can be considered forensically, see Arthur A. Just Jr., Luke: 9:51-24:53, Concordia Commentary, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 684-685. Just correctly understands the passive form δεδικαιωμένος as God who justifies, but whether this can be extended to incorporate the Pauline sense of "hav[ing] been declared righteous" is another matter.

epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine.¹⁶

Part of the equation is his view of the Gospels:

Thus, the gospel is and should be nothing less than a chronicle, a story, a narrative about Christ, telling us who he is, what he did, said, and suffered—a subject which one describes briefly, another more fully, one this way, another that way.¹⁷

Luther set the terms for hermeneutics with the principle that Scripture is its own interpreter, *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, but with James the interpreting Scripture was Paul, and so Luther concluded that "nothing of the nature of the gospel is in [James]." Had Luther measured James not by Paul but the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, he might have come to a different conclusion. Maybe not. In judging James, Luther used Reformation principles, which are themselves clichés, and *sola fide* took precedence over *sola scriptura*. Justification had become not only a homiletical principle but a hermeneutical one in interpreting the Bible.

It was not that Jesus had nothing to say about forensic justification. His perspective, however, was eschatological, with believers appearing before him as the judge, who in hearing an account of their works would pronounce the verdict. Jesus entered his ministry as this judge. At least this is how John the Baptist described him, holding a winnowing fork in his hand to sift chaff from the grain (Matt 3:12). After Peter's confession, Jesus makes this explicit, "For the Son of man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will judge all people according to their deeds" (Matt 16:27). 19 Judgment as justification finds its longest discourse in the account of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46) and is at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12), the only petition to be immediately reinforced by Jesus' commentary, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14-15). Just as Jesus saw justification in terms of the reward distributed at the judgment, so he saw justification as sacramental. The request in the Fourth Petition for supernatural bread is inseparably linked by an "and" (καί) to the Fifth Petition's request for forgiveness.²⁰ In receiving the bread, sins are forgiven.

Clichés have a way of dominating the conversation, with the result that one is

¹⁶ AE 35:362.

¹⁷ AE 35:117-118.

¹⁸ AE 35:117-118.

¹⁹ τότε ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν πρᾶξιν αὐτοῦ.

²⁰ AE 8:258. "For the sacraments have their efficacy from the wounds and blood of Christ."

seen as more important than another. For Lutherans, these clichés have to do with justification. Assign a seminarian a sermon from one of Paul's epistles, and he envisions a marvelous doctrinal discourse. Give him a pericope from a Gospel, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and he runs to Paul for relief. In facing James, Luther looked to Paul for help and then cut his losses by dismissing the epistle. James did preach Christ, but Luther did not see it. Or at least James did not measure up to Paul, and we are forever condemned to hearing the cliché that the treatise written by Jesus' brother is an epistle of straw. Luther did not see that James' self-identification as "the servant of Jesus Christ as Lord and God" (James 1:1)²¹ easily matched Thomas's confession "my Lord and my God." James had a marvelously all-embracing understanding of faith: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (James 2:1).

Rather than coming to terms with a writer's intention, one chooses the cliché that best preserves one's self-interests, and so Luther was no different than the rest of us. But the whole procedure is hardly allowed since Jesus leaves no hint that we are to value any one word of his over another. In fact, he said the exact opposite (Matt 7:24–26; 28:20). Luther said that our failure to understand the Scripture "is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but to the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth."²² Luther deviated from his own principle, and in some cases the Pauline distinctive or cliché won out. Clichés, however, are what theological life is all about. Clichés are persistent and resist extinction. One group values one set of clichés over others, and diametrically opposing theologies can find shelter under the same cliché. Such was the situation in the LCMS as early as the 1950s and still is today among Lutherans. Justification must be preserved at all costs, even if we disagree or ignore the fact that we may disagree on the deity of Christ, his resurrection, and the miracles. If Lutheran distinctives morph into clichés, so can any other term, including the name of Christ. Frequent mention of the word of Christ in a sermon does not make it Christological, and its absence does not make it non-Christological. James used the word "Christ" of Jesus twice. Jesus never used it of himself.

For good or for bad, cliché is part of life in the church, and the task of theology is to sift through the clichés to separate the wheat from the chaff. Eighteenth-century theologians kept the Lutheran distinctives, but in dissembling their meaning, what was Lutheran was lost. Honor for being the master of clichés belongs to Schleiermacher, who reassembled discarded Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican distinctives into one unified theological program. Christian distinctives made his program look Christian, but it was not truly Christian. Such is the character of the cliché that it allows the hearer to supply his own meaning or no meaning at all.

Though we might be cliché preachers and theologians holding on to our distinctives for dear life, Luther was not—at least most of the time. One distinctive for

²¹ Author's own translation.

²² AE 33:27.

him was that John 6 was not eucharistic, a position around which his faithful followers have clinched such tight fists that it has been canonized as Lutheran cliché. However, Luther did locate the Lord's Supper in John. He writes, "Among the papists this word has remained: 'The sacraments flowed out of the side of Christ.' For the sacraments have their efficacy from the wounds and blood of Christ. Therefore, this is a good and godly saying."²³

Closing an essay with a biblical reference is cliché in itself, but try one of these two. Of the making of clichés there is no end (Eccl 12:12) or chase out the old cliché and it returns with seven other clichés more meaningless than itself (Matt 12:45; Luke 11:26).



ALL THEOLOGY IS CHRISTOLOGY: AN AXIOM IN SEARCH OF ACCEPTANCE

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All Theology is Christology: An Axiom in Search of Acceptance

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Some of the most useless time in seminary classrooms is spent defending the usability of abstract phrases for which no final, definitive explanation is possible. A perennial one concerns the crucifixion of Jesus: Is it law or gospel? Since law and gospel have to do with the character of proclamation and not events in that proclamation, the crucifixion, which is an event, albeit the redemptive one, is neither law nor gospel. In the sixteenth century, Lutherans argued whether good works were detrimental or beneficial to salvation.¹ Choose your poison. We approach the correctness of the phrase "all theology is Christology" with caution. Like the question about the crucifixion, this dictum, apart from a particular context, may have multiple meanings of which some are predictably wrong. On the other hand, the phrase may provide the key for a fuller understanding of God. In fact, it will be argued here that Christology is the overarching category under which theology, that is, our knowledge of God, is to be placed. Instead of opposing attributes against one another, we should first find God in Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily (Col 2:9).

I. MISUNDERSTANDING OF "ALL THEOLOGY IS CHRISTOLOGY"

On an elementary level, the phrase might mean that Christology is the only topic in theology and hence the only course in a seminary curriculum. A student preparing for the ministry would learn nothing except the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In spite of the limitations of such a curriculum, it would certainly be preferable to those wherein Christology is sidelined in favor of such important courses as stewardship, church administration, feminism, or ecology. Surely no serious theologian in the classical Christian traditions holds that such a narrowly defined Christology encompasses an entire theological program; however, if Christology should include soteriology, it might very well do the job.

Objections to this proposition may falsely identify it with a unitarianism of the Second Person. Such "Jesus religion" can be recognized in sects that baptize in the name of Jesus alone. Christomonism is not a new phenomenon. Without explicitly denying the Trinity, it surfaced in medieval Catholic mysticism, in which the soul merged with Jesus, and in Protestant Pietism, as is evidenced in Zinzendorf's "Jesus only" hymns. The maxim that "all theology is Christology" might suitably describe Karl Barth's system, whose doctrine of revelation rests on the believer's encounter (Begegnung) with Christ. Barth's Christological bent was a reaction against Enlightenment rationalists, Immanuel Kant, and F. D. E. Schleiermacher. These forerunners of classical liberalism

¹ FC SD IV 1. The opposing phrases were: "Good works are necessary for salvation" and "It is impossible to be saved without good works."

promoted a theology where Jesus no longer played an exclusive role in revealing God. Rationalists derived knowledge of God from reason interpreting nature. Kant knew God from the moral imperative, and Schleiermacher's God emerged from consciousness. In spite of their diversities, these approaches did not recognize Jesus as the exclusive manifestation of the divine. Theology soon was replaced by *Religionsgeschichte*, which treated all religions as purely historical phenomena. These approaches were more anthropological than theological, since they studied human quests for God and, in some cases, the human situation without reference to God. Godless religion existed long before he was declared dead. Even in some church related colleges and universities, religion is often another academic discipline among the arts and sciences and is no longer entitled to a separate department. The value of theology, now devolved into religious studies, was measured by its moral and cultural usefulness for society.

Karl Barth countered this homogenization of God-with-culture by holding that Christ was the first and only revelation of God. At first, his solus Christus theology appeared to be a promising revival of Reformation beliefs. Sadly, it promised more than what it delivered. By making Christ the sole revelation of God, Barth denied the natural knowledge of God, placed the Scriptures as the word of God in a subordinate position, and had no necessary, salvific role for the sacraments. With Christ as the first, full, and only revelation of God, the gospel, by the inclusion of demand, became law. As a result, Barth appropriately entered the political arena and participated in the Barmen Declaration. His political goals were in line with those of the social gospel, against which he had originally mounted his system. He led Protestantism back into the clutches of the classical liberalism from which he promised to deliver it. In reaction to the theology of immanence spawned by Schleiermacher, Barth revived the concept of a sovereign God who was "the Wholly Other." Yet in making the moment of the encounter with Christ the revelatory connection with God, he left the initiative with the individual. The bright Christological promise of his approach faded. His failure to produce an eschatology in which unbelievers were accountable to God showed that he had not gone beyond the horizons of classical liberalism. His equalizing of divine sovereignty and grace resulted in an unspoken universalism.

Important for our immediate purposes is that a theology derived from attributes, like Barth's, is problematic. After the attributes are named, they must be defined and, to avoid contradiction or unacceptable conclusions, coordinated. If some are favored, others must be subordinated. Freedom leaves God at the mercy of an indefinite future.

² Michael Horton understands that an isolated attribute of divine sovereignty can lead to doubt and despair, so he balances it with the gospel promises: "We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god. For neither is great enough to capture the hearts and minds of our disenchanted age, especially in the face of evil, oppression, violence, and death." Michael S. Horton, "Is the New News Good News?," Modern Reformation 8, no. 5 (1999): 18.

This view has been discussed in *Modern Reformation 8*, no. 5 (1999) and *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999). See especially Paul Helm, "Openness Theology and God's 'Project' for the Future," *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999): 46–50. This review of John Sanders, The God Who Risks (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), points out that the other side of this argument of a God whose future is at risk is Arminianism, in which man has the final word.

Give love the upper hand, and the argument might go like this: "I cannot believe in a God who sends anyone to hell." What are the alternatives? A God who sends everyone to heaven or a God who annihilates people to avoid the choice? A third option leads to atheism. Divine non-existence is preferable to letting a capricious, non-loving deity survive. Deriving theology from attributes parallels Darwin's theory of natural selection: some survive and others do not.⁴

In this regard two theorems are offered. First, theological systems locating truth within human experiences, even if they use biblical or Christological terms, eventually prove to be neither Christological nor theological. Rationalism, Schleiermacher, classical liberalism, and a-futurism, in which God depends on his creation, all assign him a subordinate role. He becomes creature-like and with little advantage over his creatures in determining the future. He is simply another player on the team. *Credo in unum deum patrem omnipotentem creatorem coeli et terrae* is rendered impotent over the future. The future dissolves past omnipotence, projected guarantees are annulled, and the "and forever will be" is removed from the *Gloria Patri*. A second theorem, one that comes to definitions of God by sifting through the attributes, runs the risk of equivocation, since some terms can have both biblical and philosophical meanings. For example, love is seen as synonymous with tolerance and leads to universalism. Divine impartiality, which makes no distinction among people, has led to the ordination of women, as well as revealing a god who wants to be understood as "Mother" at least in equal standing with him (or her) as "Father."

If it is argued that faultily defined attributes lead to faulty conclusions about God, then our response is that any definition of God, even if it is framed in raw biblical terms, by itself and apart from the person of Jesus, carries the potential for error. An idolatry of stone and wood is replaced by one of abstractions masquerading behind biblical evidences.⁶ In a theology of abstractions, anything can and will go wrong. Love leads to universalism. Wrath leaves sinners at the sporadic, occasional mercy of an otherwise angry God who is free to change his mind. Infinite freedom gives God limitless possibilities including non-existence at the hands of his creatures. Internal self-perfection raises the questions of why God created in the first place and, more importantly, why he then bothered to rescue a creation that rejected him. Introducing divine sovereignty does not help; a completely self-contained God would hardly be moved from anything external. Worse still, God may be totally unconcerned. These theological failings — and that is what they are — result from isolating some attributes to the exclusion of others and then driving the chosen ones to their logical conclusions.

Some methods in defining God are deficient because they introduce the person of

⁴ Horton, "Is the New News Good News?," 11-14.

⁵ For a treatment of this issue in contemporary theology, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Future of Tolerance," in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 375–389. For example, "[Love] is not some all-condoning leniency, which is indifferent to sin, and righteousness, but a costly grace. It is neither lenient nor permissive, but merciful to sinners" (388).

⁶ Horton uses similar language: "We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god." Horton, "Is the New News Good News?," 18.

Jesus only after the theological dialogue is well under way or, in some cases, completed. Christology becomes secondary and is made to fit the contours of predetermined views of God. Its relationship to theology is only tangential, with the result that we are dealing with two different topics without a necessary relationship. At best, Christology serves to confirm a predetermined theological agenda and often to provide an escape from otherwise unacceptable views of God. Christ serves as a *deus ex machina* to whom we can assign attributes that do not fit our idea of God. Jesus is capable of involvement in the human situation in a way that God is not. He bridges the unbridgeable in an almost Arian way. By keeping Christology out of theological definition, our ideas of God are kept intact and redemption becomes an afterthought of a deity who had the options of non-redemption or redemption by another means.

Virtually all historical Christian traditions operate with the same set of divine attributes, but they are not agreed upon which are primary. For the sake of exaggeration, add feminism to the divine mix. The result is a book like *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective*, in which the keys to understanding the Third Person of the Trinity are the five senses, which are said to be more keenly developed in the gentler sex. However, even by confining ourselves to traditional attributes, the theological task goes awry. The Reformed are preoccupied with sovereignty, and Lutherans with the gospel as in the Law-Gospel motif.

II. THE HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF "ALL THEOLOGY IS CHRISTOLOGY."

Some Lutherans were understandably attracted by Barth's Christologically laden system. They were also drawn to Rudolph Bultmann's definition of the gospel as the proclamation of forgiveness, so they proceeded to make justification the only necessary tenet of their program. Their gospel-shaped theology dispenses with the law in the Christian life. Barth had fused law into gospel, but Lutherans with a gospel isolated from the law took the path to an antinomianism known as "gospel reductionism," a phrase popularized by the majority of the faculty at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis,

⁷ Rebecca B. Prichard, Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

⁸ So Horton, "This is an important warning for some who seem to regard God's sovereignty as the center of the Christian message." "Is the New News Good News?," 18.

⁹ This antinomianism had church-dividing effects, since Lutherans are bound to the Formula of Concord, the Sixth Article of which deals with the third use of the law: "[Those] who have been converted to the Lord and from whom the veil of Moses has been taken away, learn from the law to live and walk in the law" (FC SD VI 1). See also R. D. Linger, "Antinomianism," Modern Reformation 9, no. 2 (2000): 31–33. Linger identifies three kinds of antinomianism of which the first is, "once persons are justified by faith in Christ, they no longer have any obligation toward the moral law because Christ has freed them from it" (31).

¹⁰ This Christological or gospel theology relegated biblical injunctions, especially the Pauline ones, to parentheses, which were for particular churches in specific times and places, but not universally binding. The gospel not only rescued the believer from his predicament under law but abolished the law itself, and it became the trump card that took every theological trick. As long as the gospel remained intact, all things were possible. Ethical and doctrinal barriers were temporary. This position's conclusions were steeped in Christological language but were no different than those of classical liberalism.

in the 1970s and still in use.¹¹ Unencumbered by the law, "gospel reductionists" were free from such biblical injunctions as limiting the pastoral office to men. Faith was emancipated from the historicalness of the virgin birth and the resurrection. This new Christ-religion was a radicalized doctrine of justification.¹² A doctrinally-shaped ideology replaced historical reality as the basis of faith.¹³

Discussion about "all theology is Christology" took place in the late 1980s and 1990s at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. ¹⁴ Waldo J. Werning, a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor and former ally of J. A. O. and Robert D. Preus during the "gospel reductionism" controversy, took exception to a sentence in an article on sanctification and found cause to bring charges against its author and Robert D. Preus, who accepted it. ¹⁶ Superficially, "All theology is Christology" may have resembled "gospel reductionism." However, in the new controversy, no one was charged with denying the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, the historical character of its accounts, or the

- 11 Carl Braaten, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) clergyman, a one-time professor at its Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and someone who had supported the Saint Louis faculty majority, is described as being "dissatisfied with 'gospel reductionism." See Philip E. Thompson, "A New Question in Baptist History: Seeking A Catholic Spirit among Early Baptists," *Pro Ecclesia 8*, no. 1 (1999): 51. "Gospel reductionism" has allowed the ELCA to enter into full fellowship with churches whose doctrines are condemned by the Lutheran Confessions.
- 12 John H. Tietjen, in his *Memoirs in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), describes an essay he delivered to the faculty in which he argued that doctrine was not dogma and that dogma was the standard to which the church agreed. Disagreements in theology did not affect the gospel (18). He also provided ample examples of how the gospel principle works. See his listings under "Gospel" in his index (363). For a specific reference in how this applied to the ordination of women see the transcript of Robert Bertram's interview (37).
- 13 Some Luther research has tried to set this forth as the Reformer's view. For a response to this see Ulrich Asendorf, "Viva Vox Evangelii—A Necessary Course Correction," in All Theology Is Christology (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Luther's simul iustus et peccator is not an independent existential principle but one that receives its meaning from the gospel, and the gospel in turn from the resurrection and God's trinitarian life.
- 14 See David P. Scaer, "All Theology Is Christology," Modern Reformation 8, no. 5 (1999): 28-32.
- 15 Preus was well known in Evangelical circles, and so his defense of the phrase assured its notoriety. He was associated with the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy and later the Association of Confessing Evangelicals. For his book The Inspiration of Scripture, he had long been recognized as a defender of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, key doctrines for Neo-Evangelicals. In the course of his lifetime, he had worked with Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, and Earl D. Radamacher, and more lately with Robert Godfrey, Michael Horton, and R. Scott Clark, who dedicated Protestant Scholasticism to his memory. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999). His reputation as a confessional scholar was tested in preventing the LCMS from sliding into the liberalism that had engulfed mainline Protestant churches by the 1950s.
- 16 See David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," CTQ 49, no. 2–3 (1985): 181–195 (discussed below). Robert D. Preus had been a major player in the events at the Saint Louis seminary in 1974 and was responsible for keeping the institution afloat. Apart from the politics connected with any dispute, the underlying reason for the faculty majority dismissal was theological. They held to an amalgam of Barth's Christologically defined theology combined with Bultmann's demythologizing exegesis. This allowed the outward form of justification, the major tenet of Lutheran theology, to remain intact. John Tietjen described the gospel in this way: ""Works don't justify, faith does. God has already justified you. You believe God's promise. Don't be afraid." Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 7. Theirs was an existential Christology accessible in the proclamation of forgiveness, but it did not require belief in historical incarnation and resurrection. This situation occasioned formal and informal alliances between the conservative Neo-Evangelical scholars, who were conversant in these matters, and often untutored confessional Lutherans. Three months after the "Gospel reductionist" matter was resolved by the faculty majority leaving their posts, Preus became president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.
- 17 When John H. Tietjen was removed by the seminary board in January 1974, the faculty majority left their posts in protest. When they did not return to their teaching responsibilities, they were removed in February. For a description of these events see Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 161–230.

continued validity of the law for Christians. Igniting the controversy was this sentence, "Any attempt to make Christology preliminary to theology, or even only its most important part, but not its only part, is a denial of Luther's doctrine and effectively destroys the Gospel of the message of a completed atonement." This sentence was summed up as "all theology is Christology." At issue was whether Christology is part of all doctrinal definitions, including the one of God, that is, whether theology is defined in relation to Jesus. The conclusion was that Christology is not incidental but is integral to how God is understood. It profoundly informs theology.

In grammatically deciphering an intransitive sentence, the predicative nominative describes the subject. For example, in the sentence, "The dog is brown," "brown" tells us something about "dog" and distinguishes it from dogs of other colors. So, in the phrase, "all theology is Christology," Christology is descriptive. Who and what God is happens to be the subject, and the predicate nominative "Christology" describes God. Jesus' life and death are the givens; "all theology is Christology" means that in Jesus we know something about God, a claim that Jesus makes. Since no other word appears in the predicate, it is absolute. Reversing the sentence so that it reads "Christology is theology" carries a different meaning. In this case, it is assumed that we know something about God. Such knowledge would be derived from philosophy or Bible passages apart from Christ. The sentence "all Christology is Christology" is meaningless. After isolating divine attributes, the sentence requires applying them to Jesus. This procedure is problematic, because it assumes an adequate natural revelation of God or a special revelation of God apart from Christ. In designating the appropriate attributes and assigning them theological definitions, some attributes will be predictably favored over others. Marcion found an Old Testament God who hardly resembles the New Testament one, and so he anticipated rationalism, Schleiermacher, and many modern biblical scholars. Favoring certain attributes results in different understandings of God and sometimes different gods.²¹ To get around a problem that he probably did not fully

¹⁸ Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," 194.

¹⁹ Preus delivered a series of essays that provided specific references from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions to demonstrate the correctness and the necessity of the Christological approach to theology. Citing Luther in defense of a theological position may not finally be convincing to the Neo-Evangelical community or for that matter to Lutherans, but charges against him had to be resolved within the framework of the Lutheran Confessions to which ministers are bound at ordination. Within this scheme Luther's writings play a special role. It was not simply about what was permissible within the context of biblical revelation, but of Lutheran theology. See Robert D. Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1992): 33–43. This series of essays was delivered on October 28–29, 1992, at Bethany Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, three months after he was restored to his post.

²⁰ Good things are said to come from bad situations. Whether or not this is true, the tragedy in Preus's life did allow the phrase "All theology is Christology" to be evaluated, and the phrase continues to enjoy a certain prominence. A Festshrift in honor of this writer is entitled All Theology Is Christology (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000). Several authors weave the "all theology is Christology" theme into their essays. Perhaps the best analogy might be the Old Testament prophets, who instinctively knew that their words carried a greater meaning that only later men of God would more fully understand.

²¹ Michael Horton refers to some later Puritans for whom "God' had become someone other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Trinity was not as prominent as a single, unitary being of blinding glory and power." Horton, "Is the New News Good News?," 12.

recognize, one Lutheran theologian conceded that the attributes were communicated in different ways to the human nature.²² This *sic et non* approach was eating your cake and still having your incarnation.

III. "ALL THEOLOGY IS CHRISTOLOGY"

"All theology is Christology" was challenged by reference to the Athanasian Creed, where the divine persons share an equality in which none is before or after another. Another objection was the Lord's Prayer's address to the Father.²³ In reply to these, one person of the Trinity and his work cannot be isolated from the others. We can only pray the Lord's Prayer because Christ has made us God's children. Apart from opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt, each divine person exists within the Trinity in relation to the others (perichoresis).24 This view is undermined, at least in Lutheran circles, when theology is divided into the three articles of the Creed as First Article, Second Article, and Third Article Christianity, as if a theology of each divine person apart from the other persons was possible. In confessing God as Father, belief in Christ is anticipated and included, and so the Second Article does not begin with an additional "I believe," but an "and." If a trinitarian theology is endangered by a detachment of the persons from one another, then understanding God by his attributes apart from his trinitarian character leaves the impression that it is an afterthought. This approach is evident in discourses that first treat at length the doctrine of God and only then proceed to discuss the Trinity. In an earlier time, such trinitarian-less theologies might have passed as a conservative unitarianism. "All theology is Christology" is not synonymous with "all theology is filiology." Christology has to do with Jesus, the Word made flesh who assumed our humanity, and not merely the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus of Nazareth is the human face of God. In his image we know the Father (Col 1:15), and in his humanity God is fully encased.

Christology, therefore, informs what we think about God. Jesus is not a gnostic revealer of dark mysteries, but the one who completely envelops God simply because God has completely enveloped him into the divine being. The order of John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," cannot be reversed, so that either through the Father or the Spirit we may know Jesus. Tampering with the order so that the Father is known before the Son results in a temporary unitarianism, at least until we get to Christology. Defining theology Christologically requires not only holding that Jesus shows us God being God, but also that the revelation of God is accomplished in the humiliation of Jesus by crucifixion. This is the one, chief, historic moment of trinitarian

Francis Pieper writes, "Quenstedt sums the truths on this point in full agreement with Scripture as follows: 'It is correctly said that all divine attributes are communicated to the human nature, likewise, that certain are not, and that none are communicated. All are communicated with regard to indwelling and possession, but certain ones as regards predication and definite statement, as the operative which have state and action, among which we may name omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But this does not hold true of the quiescent attributes, as eternity, infinity, and the like. No attributes are communicated by way of transfusion from one substance into another." Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:242.

²³ Waldo J. Werning, Making the Missouri Synod Functional (Fort Wayne, IN: Biblical Renewal Productions, 1992), 210–211.

²⁴ ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί (John 14:11).

self-revelation on which other moments are dependent. The crucifixion goes beyond revealing secret knowledge by including the redemption by which Jesus draws sinners through the cross into the inner recesses of the Father (Matt 11:25–30).²⁵

The Spirit must also be understood Christologically.²⁶ Knowing the Spirit without reference to Jesus allows him to function as a *Weltgeist* who makes God accessible without Jesus. This provides an opening for universalism. The Pentecost of Acts 2 concludes the giving of the Spirit, who received his form in Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10; John 1:32), life (Matt 4:1), death (Matt 27:50; John 19:30), and resurrection (John 20:22). The Spirit who proceeds from the Son (*filioque*) is shaped by Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Spirit of God becomes the Spirit of Jesus (John 16:13–14). *Incarnatus est de spiritu sancti* begins to open the door to a trinitarian understanding of God and renders other theological attempts by themselves inadequate. Only through and after the death of Jesus is God known as Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt 28:19).

IV. "GOD CRUCIFIED"

Richard Bauckham, author of the volume entitled *God Crucified* and former professor at the University of St. Andrew's, moves theology beyond the incarnation to the humiliation of the cross.²⁷ In creedal terms, theology is not merely defined by *incarnatus est*, but by *homo factus est*. Theology is no longer obligated to answer philosophical questions asked of the incarnation,²⁸ a practice that arose in the patristic period,²⁹ but it recognizes the agony of the Crucified as the true face of God, the perfect revelation of *who he is*. In the dying of Jesus, God and his glory are known. Crucifixion is not merely the door to the divine reality, but it is the event in which that reality is present and hidden. The impenetrable God is accessible in the crucified Jesus. The cross is both God's humiliation and exaltation and, in it, Jesus honors God and

²⁵ Compare Martin Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation," especially thesis 21: "God can be found only in suffering on the cross, as has already been said." Martin Luther, Luther's Works, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 31:53; hereafter AE. This, of course, leads Luther to make personal suffering a qualification for being a theologian (AE 31:40).

²⁶ See David P. Scaer, "Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur: The Spirit Understood Christologically," CTQ 61, no. 1-2 (1997): 93-112.

²⁷ Bauckham writes, "The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the Christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is." Richard Bauckham, God Crucified (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 46. See also 56–61, in particular, "The identity of God—who God is—is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving. Only the Servant can also be the Lord" (61). Much of his material on this subject is found in Richard Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9–11," in Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 128–39.

²⁸ Bauckham states, "The question is not: how can the infinite become a finite creature, how can the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God take on human limitations?" See God Crucified, 60.

²⁹ Bauckham suggests the real contrast is not between the divine and human natures, but between the image of God as the exalted emperor and the servant; see *God Crucified*, 61–62.

God honors Jesus.³⁰ Here God glorifies the Son, and the Spirit's mission is defined.³¹ Christology, defined in the Cross, may contradict a philosophically-delineated God to the point of scandal and embarrassment even of believers, but here is Israel's Redeemer who has taken on flesh in Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). The human Jesus receives divine honors. Divine uniqueness is not compromised but expressed by incarnation and crucifixion.³² Bauckham writes, "Jesus, the New Testament writers are saying, belongs inherently to who God is."³³ The crucified Christ belongs to the divine identity.³⁴ "This radical self-renunciation was [Christ's] way of expressing and enacting his equality with God, and therefore ([Philippians 2:] v. 9) it qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things."³⁵ Humiliation, no less than exaltation, belongs to the identity of God.³⁶ The hour of the cross is the glorification of both the Father and the Son (John 17:1).

By appending "S.D.G.," soli Deo gloria, to his musical compositions, Johann Sebastian Bach confessed that his music was his vocation. I suspect that today some Lutherans use the phrase synergistically to give God some credit for their accomplishments. For the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), glorifying God is not optional: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."37 The God who gives of himself in begetting the Son also gives of himself in creating and in redeeming. God's glory is inherent in the Father begetting the Son and their giving procession to the Spirit. The God who is composed of an eternal self-giving in trinitarian life extended that selfgiving in creation, redemption, and sanctification. In sacrificing themselves for others, Christians are not only following in Christ but are adopting the divine posture of God's trinitarian self-giving. Peter's death glorifies God (John 21:19) and so resembles Christ's death, which reveals the glory in which the Father and the Son live (John 17:1). Within himself and as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, God is not impassible, that is, without emotion, but possibility and emotion exist in their highest form in God. His sending the Son (John 3:15) does not result from an arbitrary decision, but it is an extension of the Father's eternal love for the Son (John 3:35). The ontological Trinity in which the Father begets the Son is love in its purest and original form. So, R. Scott Clark, "In this case, we know that the Trinity we worship is no static deity, but rather there are dynamic relations among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is out of that dynamic, loving fellowship that both creation and redemption have emerged."38

In begetting the Son, the Father gives of himself, and in this self-giving he knows

³⁰ Bauckham, God Crucified, 66.

^{31 &}quot;Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

³² Bauckham, God Crucified, 4, 28.

³³ Bauckham, God Crucified, 47; emphasis original

³⁴ Bauckham, God Crucified, 48.

³⁵ Bauckham, God Crucified, 58

³⁶ Bauckham, God Crucified, 61. Also, "Jesus' self-humiliation actually is exaltation by God" (67).

³⁷ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.

³⁸ R. Scott Clark, "The Splendor of the Three-in-One God," Modern Reformation 8, no. 5 (1999): 38.

himself and is known as Father. The Son, in turn, responds to the Father not out of morbid, resentful obligation but out of the love that he receives from the Father. Apart from the Son, the Father is not Father, and the Son without the Father is not the Son. The inter-trinitarian relationship is a divine necessity marked with the pathos and emotion that inherently belong to self-giving. In sacrificing his Son by crucifixion, God is not doing something inexplicably alien to his being (even though it might be alien to some personal views of God), but he accomplishes what intrinsically belongs to who he is. Theology and Christology are now positioned to shape faith and ethics. Commands to love God and the neighbor (Matt 22:27-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27) are not arbitrary regulations of a sovereign God but are necessary extensions of the Father's eternal love in begetting the Son, seen in offering him as a sacrifice (John 15:9-17). Faith is a giving of the self in that we renounce ourselves and put God at the core of our lives by loving him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. God's selfgiving caused him to see his fallen creatures as his neighbors and in coming to our rescue made us his friends. In loving the neighbor in place of ourselves, we begin to approach and reflect in ourselves the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ's humiliation.

"All theology is Christology" is only one way of expressing the great commandments to love God and the neighbor. Behind these concepts is divine self-sacrifice, which binds together that enterprise we call theology. The self-sacrificial character of His Trinitarian nature does not allow God an indeterminate future. Rather, He must rescue those who cannot rescue themselves, because He must love even those who without Him can only love themselves. Any system is doomed by falling on the sword of its own inconsistency. Understanding God as self-giving may seem to be contradictory in that God cannot be understood by coordinating his attributes. In response, what is said about democracy as the most inefficient form of government devised by man might by analogy be applied to divine self-giving: it is superior to all other options. We could also argue that self-giving is not an abstract attribute but a tangible reality in God crucified. From the lowliness of his cross Christ calls those who are burdened to share in the trinitarian mysteries:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:25–30)

"All theology is Christology" does not do an injustice to our doctrine of God but opens it up to the fuller reality of God's essence by looking at his intentions. Neither does the Christological approach replace justification as the key to the theological task; rather, it provides justification with the necessary content of Christ and God. When

the controverted phrase surfaced, no one understood its full implications, even though Robert D. Preus staked his position on it. This essay only makes a modest attempt at a fuller development. My colleague, William C. Weinrich, writes about his "conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theological [is] to speak Christologically." The following citation from N.T. Wright summarizes our view:

The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. *It is a new understanding of God.* Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying image) image, God reveals the truth about what it meant to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present Christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.⁴⁰

³⁹ William C. Weinrich, "The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present," in All Theology Is Christology (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Weinrich also notes Bauckham's contribution to this discussion (219). Differences in Christology's role in theology are reflected in differing interpretation of Philippians 2. For a treatment of the stakes in the argument, see the essays in Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2. The New International Version, in translating verse 2, "did not grasp at equality with God," favors the traditional Reformed view, which is less than fully comfortable in ascribing God-like qualities to Christ's human nature (genus maiestaticum), which is the Lutheran position. For a discussion of the exegetical options, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 99–110.

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 84, cited in Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," 104–105; emphasis added.



JUSTIFICATION: SET UP WHERE IT OUGHT NOT TO BE

(July/October 2016)

Justification: Set Up Where It Ought Not to Be

JULY/OCTOBER 2016

THE more significant the person, the greater the disagreements about the value of his life's work, and in the case of Jesus, his existence. From a religious perspective the three greats are Jesus, Paul, and Luther, and if by measure of the number of books written about them, Luther is surpassed only by Jesus, a position of honor that will be re-enforced in the five-hundred-year Reformation celebration. At issue with Jesus is how much do we know about him or whether we know anything at all. Should the latter be the case, the authors of the Gospels created, in the incredibly short period of twenty to forty years, the most successful and complex hoax of all times. Should the Gospels prove to be a hoax, yes, even fiction as David Friedrich Strauss proposed in the nineteenth century and more recently by Robert M. Price, the third quest for the historical Jesus should immediately be aborted so that it does not shift into fourth gear, and our attention should be diverted to a quest for the historical conspirators who came up with the Jesus idea. To reference Paul, if Jesus did not exist, we are of all men to be the most pitied (1 Cor 15:19). In comparison to Jesus, Luther (as does Paul) has a more secure place in history. With Luther we have the near certainty that he is securely entombed in the floor of the church behind the doors on which once hung the ninetyfive theses — and that's debated too.

Lest we think the quest for the historical Jesus is of no value, a faith focused on the God who became incarnated in the man Jesus requires that we first know him in history — what Paul calls knowing Jesus after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16). Resurrection is subsequent to incarnation, but from an evidential point of view, Jesus' resurrection is the touchstone for the veracity of Christianity. Without the resurrection having a fixed place in history, we are caught between agnosticism and fideism. Basing the existence of Jesus on faith comports with the doctrine of justification by faith so that the one question is easily confused with the other. Matters are not helped by heralding that justification is the doctrine by which church stands or falls, the one doctrine that serves and interprets all others. So, with good reason one suspects that some who reference Luther find in his doctrine of justification by faith an excuse for not coming to terms with what place Jesus has in history. Such Luther research allows for a self-contained Reformation neoorthodoxy, a Barthianism of sorts, that does not bother to come to terms about what we can know about Jesus.

At the other end of spectrum from any skepticism about Jesus is the common piety that finds security in the doctrine of justification by faith. Any doubts about the place of Jesus in history can be resolved by faith. Fideism is the universal cure-all for uncertainty. Those who fear examining the historical data from what might be

¹ James K. Beibly and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., The Historical Jesus: Five Views (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). The radical view is offered by Robert M. Price, "Jesus at the Vanishing Point," 55–83.

uncovered can find support in Martin Kähler, who held that "faith does not rely on guarantees created by external authorities." In this case Luther's doctrine of justification not only defines the believer's relationship to God through Christ but replaces concerns about his historical existence. Justification is made to exist in a self-contained bubble so that scholars are relieved of coming to terms with the origins of Christianity in the man Jesus. Justification becomes the one-size-fits-all doctrine. Problematic with this perspective is that faith is made to feed upon itself in a continuous recycling — never having to touch the historical reality set in motion by God becoming man.

Those who see faith as determinative for the content and certainty of Christianity belong to the heritage of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, who saw Christianity springing from the heightened religious self-consciousness of Jesus transmitted through the community of his followers. In making justification by faith the controlling indispensable theological principle, Christianity is gutted. Hence the title of this essay, "Justification: Set Up Where It Ought Not to Be" (Mark 13:14). It might have just as easily carried the title "The Overuse of Justification in Biblical Interpretation, Theology, and Preaching." Bringing the past into the present, the approach popularized by Karl Barth,3 relieves us of coming to terms with the past and allows for multiple and even contradictory options of who Jesus was. Attempting to cross Gotthold Lessing's ditch, that historical truth cannot be demonstrated,4 leads to despair, so it is better to stand on the side of faith, content with the "Word," and avoid looking down into the abyss.

A faith-based piety as the foundation for Christianity in not coming to terms with the past is now more likely to rely on Karl Barth, who substituted the proclaimed "Word" for past historical events. A theology of the "Word" that presents itself as a Reformation theology can be a cover for historical agnosticism, or at least it relieves us of having to determine what happened to Jesus. Diverse as the piety characterized by Schleiermacher's theology of religious consciousness and Barth's "Word" theology are, both share in the heritage of Immanuel Kant, in that we can never get closer to past events than the impressions left on the minds of those who claimed to be observers. With Kant we only know the noumena but not the phenomena. So, we are left in the dilemma of never knowing what really happened or even if anything happened at all - what the Germans call wie es eigentlich geschehen ist. So, we no longer have to wrestle with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as historical events in our theology and preaching. For those following Barth, faith no longer finds certainty in a something or a someone, like the person of Jesus, but in proclamation of the "Word," in which the hearer finds himself justified, a position that is purported to make generous use of Luther's theology of the Word.5

² Carl Braaten, "Martin Kähler (1836–1912)," Lutheran Quarterly 28, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 411.

³ Karl Barth, Christian Dogmatics, tr. and ed. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 1/1:143-162.

⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings, tr. by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87.

⁵ See for example Timothy J. Wengert, Reading the Bible with Martin Luther (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). In a sub-chapter entitled, "The Self-Authenticating Scripture," Wengert argues that the Scripture "is God's Word because 'it does God to me.' . . . Or, to put it another way, God's Word makes believers in Christ out of us. When

Paul ranks second in importance in the triumvirate of Jesus-Paul-Luther, but no scholar, at least in my reading, has ever questioned his existence; though Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles are removed from his curriculum vitae and assigned to an anonymous first century Christian who took advantage of the apostle's prestige and who arguably rivaled him as a theologian. In Paul's willingness to die for Jesus, there exists a pathetic irony in giving his life for a man whose claim to fame by being raised from the dead is now seen beyond the grasp of historical certainty. But for the sake of argument, suppose that Jesus really existed. This would mean Jesus and Paul were contemporaries, or may be even the same age. To take the argument further, there would be good reason to hold that Paul would have been in Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' life. There, Gamaliel groomed his prize pupil to be a Pharisee (Acts 5:34; 27:3). So, if Paul did not confront Jesus at his trial, which is a plausible view, he engaged in intense study of who he was when Christians became temple nuisances.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4) is interpreted as Paul's persecution of the church as Christ's body, even though this doctrine is not found in Luke or Acts, but if the words are taken literally — or as some would say, "literalistically" — he may have been a backbencher at the trial of Jesus. Here we fall into the horrors of anachronism, that if anyone should have had a stake in quests for the historical Jesus yielding positive results, it had to be Paul. If he had indiscriminately accepted the oral tradition that was in its birth throes in the mid-30s, that Jesus had been raised from the dead, without examining the evidences of the Jerusalem tomb, he was not the scholar he or others thought he was. If questioning whether Paul ever lived has never been a serious option, determining what his theology really was has in recent years captured scholarly imagination. The New Perspective argues that Paul is best understood as a mediator in breaking through the exclusivity of Jewish Christians in getting them to accept Gentile newcomers as equal partners in the covenant.6 This debate has consequences for Luther research. If the New Perspective proves to be right, then Luther's definition of justification as one's accountability for sin before God and declaration of acquittal by the same God — what some Lutherans call Law and Gospel — is a misinterpretation of Paul and so the entire Reformation enterprise is called into question.

An equation mark cannot or should not be placed between how Paul and Luther each understood justification. Understanding Luther does not translate into understanding Paul. One cannot be superimposed upon the other. Paul, in his own words, was a Pharisee and a son of the Pharisees, and in his own mind he did religion better than others (Acts 26:5). In Reformation terms, he performed works of supererogation. Had purgatory existed at his time, he would have been given a pass.

a word does not do that, no matter who the author may be, it is not God's Word and has no — or only limited authority" (10).

⁶ For a critique of recent reinterpretations of Paul's doctrine of justification, see Stephen Westerholm, Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Paul Theme (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). See also also Arland J. Hultgren, review of Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Paul Theme, by Stephen Westerhom, in Lutheran Quarterly 28, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 358–359.

His was a righteousness of the law. Now compare Paul's religious self-confidence with Luther's search for certainty, which was a factor in leading him to the doctrine of justification by faith. Coming from opposite ends of the personality and theological spectrums — Paul's overconfidence and Luther's lack of it — each arrived at the same destination, that justification has to do with one's standing before God, to be condemned by the law and acquitted by the gospel.

Justification is a matter of the first great commandment of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things, so Luther's explanations of the First Commandment in the Large and Small Catechisms. Sanctification has to do with the second great commandment in how we deal with others, but its secondary position makes it no less necessary than the first (Matt 22:36-38). The New Perspective on Paul reverses the order and gives first place to the second great commandment requiring love for others, especially those who are racially, culturally, or ethnically different. Good relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians replaces the longstanding view that Paul's concern was how individuals, by faith in Christ, are received by God. To be clear, the second great commandment, that of loving the neighbor, is what we call "sanctification," derives its life from the first great commandment of faith in God, what we call "justification." Sanctification is logically dependent on justification, but this does not mean that loving the neighbor is inferior to loving God — quite to the contrary! To express the matter in biblical terms, how can one love God whom one has not seen and hate one's neighbor whom he has seen (1 John 4:20). Reformation beliefs have a stake in still-current scholarly studies. Should the historical quest for Jesus continue to give birth to uncertain and mixed results, Christianity would have to be reconstituted and of course this began in earnest with the Age of the Enlightenment. If the New Perspective on Paul trumps the traditional Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, the Reformation can be celebrated as a cultural or historical phenomenon in the West, but not as one that correctly understood Paul. It would also mean that even if Rome may not have entirely grasped Paul's understanding of justification, its inclusion of an ethical component in justification places it closer to the heart of the apostle's theology.

Here we rehearse our arguments. More fundamental to Christianity, and so also for Lutheranism, than anything else is securing a firm place in history for Jesus. Without this there is no incarnation, and without incarnation there is no resurrection, and, without the resurrection, justification by grace through faith is no more than a theological abstraction. Paul places makes our justification (Rom 4:25) and his apostleship as dependent on Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:8, 17–18). The one who is unfit to be called an apostle witnessed the resurrection. In this trinity of resurrection, incarnation, and justification, to borrow a phrase from the Athanasian Creed, one is not before or after another, but as in the divine Trinity, in which one divine person depends on the others in a specific way, so justification depends on Jesus' resurrection, which in turn depends on the incarnation. Just as the place and function of each of the three divine persons cannot be shifted to another, so justification, resurrection, or

incarnation each has its own order in the economy of salvation. Each is essential, but the function of one cannot be given to the other.

A shuffling or a reassignment of the functions of these core Christian teachings was at heart of the theology of the faculty majority at Concordia Seminary in their February 1974 walkout. Justification, the doctrine explicating one's standing before God, was assigned the role that in theology belongs to the resurrection as the historical foundation for Christianity. Resurrection, like other events, is one we can get our hands on, an event subject to historical critique in a way that justification is not. Incarnation is inaccessible to historical examination. However, the virgin birth of Jesus as the sign of the incarnation was to Mary a real event in her life, though only she knew that a male was not involved. The presence of justification is verifiable not by historical critique as the resurrection is but by observation of the works that faith performs, an argument put forth by John the Baptist: faith produces visible works (Matt 3:8). This was essential to the preaching of Jesus as for example in the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46) and helps us to come to terms with James, who argues that faith is seen by its works (Jas 2:14–16).

Although the 1974 St. Louis seminary conflict might have appeared to some to be over biblical inerrancy, it was really over the negative conclusions of the quests for the historical Jesus. Although most did not share these doubts and some seemed to be less than fully informed, they allowed those who did to continue as teachers of the church as long as they held to a doctrine of justification which claimed that by faith God justifies sinners. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith was the doctrine that unified both sides of the controversy and so in that moment, justification by faith was assigned the role that belongs to the resurrection of Jesus as the basis of Christianity.8

The position of the St. Louis seminary faculty majority in February 1974 was rooted in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment reinterpretation of miraculous events as ordinary ones or as never having happened at all. To save the day, Schleiermacher shifted the foundation of Christianity away from what was observable to the consciousness of the community of the followers of Jesus, a view that was given a Lutheran hue by the Erlangen theologians and strongly opposed by Francis Pieper, the Missouri Synod's premier theologian of the early twentieth century. In the theology of the St. Louis faculty, justification by faith took the place of the Scriptures as the basis of the theological task. Pieper had provided a rarely recognized variant in that while insisting on belief in the entire Bible for salvation, justification by faith sufficed. Thus, two principles stood side by side: the Bible determined what must be believed but only faith was required for justification. The inadequacy of this division was resolved in using the

⁷ For Wengert, "The fundamentals of the Christian faith, to use [the fundamentalists'] terms for it, are such things as the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, the bodily resurrection, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, along with such doctrines as the Trinity and the two natures of Christ": Reading the Bible with Martin Luther, 9.

⁸ Wengert holds to the same view. "To put it most radically, Luther and those who follow his approach prefer saying that the Hebrew Scriptures, like the New Testament, gain authority when they too support Christians in their faith—that is, in their trust of God in Christ. And do they ever do that!" Reading the Bible with Martin Luther, 12.

⁹ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 3-7.

distinction of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. Fundamental doctrines were further subdivided into primary and secondary ones. In the last century, Rudolph Bultmann produced his own bifurcation. He affirmed an existential interpretation of justification by faith and at the same time he proposed a historically-agnostic method of demythologizing. Both he and Paul Tillich defined justification as finding one's authentic existence.

An existential definition of faith hardly fit the classical Lutheran Reformation definition that saw a flesh-and-blood Jesus as the object of faith, but those who assented to the traditional view were in some cases not agreed on the role faith played in justification, a matter that came to the fore in American Lutheranism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' election controversy. On one side, the Missouri Synod held that election and justification were prior to faith. On the other side the Ohio Synod held that God elected to salvation those whom he knew would come to faith, a position abbreviated by the Latin *intuitu fide*, that is, "in view of faith." This view had similarities to ones held by Pietism, Fundamentalism, and now Evangelicalism, that faith is substance-like, almost a thing, which through spiritual exercise and prayer could be strengthened and increased."

Neoorthodoxy's "Word" theology appears in those interpretations of Luther that locate the certainty of salvation not in the Scriptures but in the act of being justified by faith, an act which was understood as coming to terms with the preached or proclaimed word. With this, the history of Jesus is given a secondary role to the "Word" in action¹² and the Latin or Anselmic view of the atonement in which Christ stands in mankind's place before God to be condemned fades. Both views, the one that holds to justification by faith apart from what can be known historically of Jesus and the other, that God justifies believers only after or because they come to faith, attribute to faith the defining role. As diverse as these views are, they locate the determinative theological moment in the believer's faith, in which the entire theological reality is encapsulated and gives believers certainty.¹³ Although in its original context of St. Louis in the year 1974, "gospel reductionism" referred to favoring proclamation over biblical history as the foundational theological principle, the phrase is applicable to any program that

¹⁰ Bultmann's demythologizing was a variant of the eighteenth-century Rationalist view that Jesus and the apostles accommodated their teachings to common erroneous beliefs. For Bultmann this was done by anonymous early Christians.

¹¹ Its popularity among Lutherans is found in preferring those hymns in which the believer with his faith is placed in the center of the theological program.

¹² Oswald Bayer understands absolution, baptism, and the Lord's Supper as the same kind of speech acts as preaching. "Twenty Questions on the Relevance of Luther for Today," *Lutheran Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 441. Karl Barth, following Calvin, held that the workings and the effects of the word and the sacraments were the same. See David P. Scaer, *Baptism, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* 11 (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 1999), 175. In this essay as in some of his other writings, Bayer does not explicate how the proclaimed word is rooted in the history of Jesus.

¹³ During the presidency of the late Robert D. Preus, this seminary had to address what was understood as a denial of objective justification, that is, that there was no justification prior to the moment of when faith is engendered. The Lutheran World Federation that was established with great promise could not come to agreement on justification at its July 1963 Helsinki Convention.

places justification within the moment that faith grasps the proclamation.

Ironically, the doctrine of justification, the doctrine on which the church stands or falls, is without an agreed-upon definition among Lutherans, so its function as a standard for theology and an outline for preaching has been compromised, though in practice this discrepancy is not recognized. Thus, a typical Lutheran sermon is recognized in making its hearers aware of their moral inadequacy before God and concludes with the assurance that the gospel rectifies their miserable condition. Such Law-Gospel sermons work into the homiletical twenty minutes all the years between Luther's vow to St. Anne in being struck with divine terror in a thunderstorm to his discovery of his doctrine of justification by faith. Each sermon becomes the Reformation in a nutshell and achieves its purpose in the hearer's self-awareness that he has been accepted by God for Christ's sake. Such a sermon has met the Lutheran Law-Gospel paradigm and it can be preached without coming to terms with the history of Jesus or the atonement or, for that matter, the text which it intends to expound. In such Law-Gospel sermons, faith created by the preached or proclaimed "Word" takes on a life of its own and can be preached by both those who take the biblical history seriously and those who do not. Neoorthodoxy is administered in the form of a Lutheran homiletical pill. Belief in the message is all that matters. So, it was with the St. Louis faculty in 1974, who located justification in the preached "Word" apart from any prior, necessarilyheld historical reality.

Gospel reductionism, the Missouri Synod's provincial version of neoorthodoxy, relegated the historical reliability of biblically reported events to "adiaphora," the dogmatical term for what is expendable. Proclamation of the gospel accomplishes its purpose in creating faith as the encounter with God quite apart from whether what the Gospels report actually ever happened. Since preaching or proclamation possesses an importance in itself, gospel reductionism might also be called "justification reductionism." Justification, quite apart from how it is defined, provides foundation, content, and purpose for the entire theological enterprise. Calling this method "gospel reductionism" gave the impression that the Lutheran Law-and-Gospel paradigm of preaching in condemning and rescuing the sinner remained in place. However, justification was given an existential twist in that it was no longer what God first accomplished in the man Jesus by his death as atonement, but what was accomplished in the hearer by preaching. Now justification was seen as the hearer's own consciousness or awareness of his condition in being accepted by God. Preaching allowed the hearer

¹⁴ David P. Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod," Springfielder 36 (December 1972), 156–171; "The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod Continued" Springfielder 40 (September 1976), 107–118; Scott R. Murray, Law, Life and Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 103–107. Brought forth as an example of how the method worked was the Old Testament prophet Jonah's encounter with a large fish. Tossing that account to the winds as little more than a fish story eliminated only two sides of one page in the Hebrew Bible and with thirty-eight books in the old canon, its loss would be negligible. Problematic was that Matthew and Luke have Jesus using Jonah as the point of comparison for his own resurrection. The thing by which another thing is compared has the greater value. Jonah was the whipping boy for putting the resurrection of Jesus up for grabs. Gospel reductionist proponents were less interested in Jonah than they were in the virgin birth of Jesus, his miracles, and the resurrection.

to come to terms with his own existence.15

Placing faith in the moment of justification surfaced in the Missouri Synod less than two decades after the dust in St. Louis had settled. Justification followed faith and was dependent on it. Lutherans traditionally had spoken of universal or objective justification, in which God accepts all humanity in Christ, and of subjective justification as the individual appropriate of justification by faith. The new position held only to subjective justification. There was a prior redemption but no universal act of God by which he accepts all of humanity in Christ. This view resembled gospel reductionism and neoorthodoxy in making faith in the proclamation primary. It differed from the Lutheran form of neoorthodoxy in that it did not make the Bible as word of God dependent on the believing hearer. Since the hearer was not forgiven until he believed, justification was dependent on faith. This view is better understood as sanctification and resembles Roman Catholicism in that justification is understood as what God works in believers through baptism.¹⁶

Although the St. Louis faculty lobbied and received widespread support for its position from the guild of scholars, gospel reductionism was nevertheless a Lutheran idiosyncrasy developed by Rudolph Bultmann. On one hand it incorporated what purported to be Luther's doctrine of justification into the hermeneutical task, but on the other hand it allowed the demythologizing method of biblical interpretation. Little was left of the historical Jesus. Since then, this particular method has fallen into disuse. Historical criticism, philosophy, and theology each has its own principles and so in an ideal world historical critical scholars should not be driven by ideology, but they are. By placing its understanding of justification at the center of the hermeneutical task, the St. Louis faculty was no different than others in introducing an external principle into the biblical task, but this is how the scholarly game is played. Consider the title of this recent publication: An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation. It purports to combine both African and feminine interpretations of the Bible.¹⁷ In this approach the culture in which the Bible is read takes precedence over the culture in which it was written. In any event, according to this view, the culture of the author and his first readers may never be fully recovered and if it is, it is secondary in importance to how the reader now understands it. Therefore, whether it should be called historical criticism remains a question. Gospel reductionism's deceptively Lutheran appearance was the Trojan horse that opened the door for its reception into the Missouri Synod, where justification was hailed as the chief doctrine. 18 Justification was intended to serve Christology and not the other way around, but Luther's understanding of justification

¹⁵ Pieper speaks of this as the fides reflexa, but holds that only fides directa is saving: Christian Dogmatics 3:444-445.

¹⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 481-483.

¹⁷ Nyasha Junior, Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westinster John Knox Press, 2015).

¹⁸ See Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 514: "Thus Christology serves merely as the substructure of the doctrine of justification." Lutheran theology was conceived in the cauldron of the confrontation with Roman Catholics who allowed works into their understanding of justification, in how the believer stood before God; and so it became the pivotal organizing principle of the Augsburg Confession. Attributing justification to works diminished the work of Christ, so the confession argued.

gave him reason to take exception to Hebrews, Revelation, and most famously to James.

Luther's writings are not "bible" for Lutherans, even in lower case, though in some cases it seems so. What he said about this or that book in his Prefaces to the New Testament¹⁹ are at least the bluebook that is consulted for value, and his comments that "St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw" have not escaped notice and have given reason for some to suggest that he was on cutting edge of historical criticism.²⁰ In deference to the Reformer, Lutheran commentators explain that since straw has a purpose, this is not as uncomplimentary as it looks; however with this sentence matters go from bad to worse. "Therefore St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."21 By evaluating James with what he holds to be Paul's doctrine of justification, Luther makes Paul's epistles canonically determinative. Luther has replaced the authority of the apostles, in their being witnesses of the resurrection, with the doctrine of justification. Paul's epistles, 1 Peter, and 1 John met Luther's standards. Then he winnowed the true books down to Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians as "the true kernel and marrow of all the books."22 Luther's preferences do not prevent him from adding this caveat that "in them you do not find many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and this salvation. This is the real nature of the gospel, as you have heard." Luther says he would rather do without the works of Christ than his words. Perhaps Luther is at his hyperbolic best, but should it not be the other way around, that the deeds of Christ through which God accomplished salvation take precedence in providing the substance to what is preached?

What Luther said could be put to good use and perhaps was by the proponents of gospel reductionism, who elevated preaching the gospel above the deeds of Christ, and who placed the latter on the back shelves of inconsequential adiaphora. This is what neoorthodoxy was all about and still is when it appears in scholarly Luther research.

Luther's preference for John over the other three Gospels cannot escape notice. "So too, the epistles of St. Paul and St. John far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke." These books "show you Christ and teach all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear other books or doctrine." Some scholars cite Luther's favoring one book over another in

¹⁹ Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament" (1546 (1522)): vol. 35, pp. 395–397, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/ Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009–), hereafter AE.

²⁰ Wengert uses Luther's comments on James to foster his own program of biblical interpretation and places it in his first chapter, "Authority," with the subtitle "Putting James in Its Place": Reading the Bible with Martin Luther, 1–21.

²¹ Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," AE 35:362.

²² Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," AE 35:361-362.

²³ Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," AE 35:362. Luther's immodest preference for John is counterbalanced by his sermons on Matthew. Favoring one book over another is not unusual. Scholars can give good reason for their favored gospel, but unmatched is Matthew's preservation of the trinitarian formula or Luke's look into inner trinitarian function: "And behold, I send the promise of my Father" (Luke 24:49).

support of their own critical views, but rarely note that Luther's conclusions came from his own personal dilemma of being confronted with an avenging God, for which he found relief in a doctrine of justification articulated by Paul. Historical criticism, as it was conceived in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, reinterpreted miraculously reported events as natural ones or denied them altogether. These methods use different and opposing programs and so the expression "the historical critical method" would best be dropped, but it won't be. One method accepts only those things in the Bible that have correlations to other events and another approach holds only what is unique in the life of Jesus is authentic. In the past three centuries the criteria have shifted, as have the results, which have contradicted one another, making claims to objectivity suspect. Speaking of Luther as a historical critic is inappropriate, but this does mean that his making justification the one determinative principle for interpretation is above critique?

Luther making Paul and John canonically normative stands at odds with the early church's near total dependence on Matthew with little use of Paul until the end of the second century. Pamans, Ephesians, Galatians—books Luther says hold "the true kernel and marrow of all the books"—have no reference to the Lord's Supper. John, the favored gospel, also has no reference to the Lord's Supper unless one concedes that John 6 offers a discourse on this sacrament, which Luther's gnesio-followers are unlikely to do. None of his favored books provides the Lord's Prayer or the baptismal formula. Cause for the alleged biblical lack of clarity in any book resides not in the Spirit-inspired writer but in the hearers who at the first hearing often seemed not to have gotten things straight. Misunderstandings are not without a purpose. Without them 2 Corinthians, 2 Thessalonians, and 2 Peter may have never seen the light of day. Nor would our sermons.

The inadequacies that Luther finds in James should not go unanswered. Here they are: 1. James disagrees with Paul and the rest of the Scripture on justification. 2. James speaks of a general faith in God, not faith in Christ specifically. 3. James does not teach or mention the suffering and resurrection of Christ, nor does he mention the Holy Spirit. 4. James knows only the law, which, Luther concedes, he preaches vigorously. 5. James throws things together chaotically. 6. James calls the law "the law of liberty." Basic to Luther's critique of James is making Paul canonically determinative, but had he applied the same measuring rod to the teaching of Jesus, he may have had to exclude most of it, as he did James. Take, for example, the last judgment scene where eternal bliss is awarded to those who tended to the hungry, thirsty, homeless, poorly clothed, sick, and imprisoned brothers of Jesus (Matt 25:36–37). This parallels James' concerns about Christians who favored the rich in the congregation and ignored the poor. By this they dishonored Jesus, who is the poorest of men (Jas 2:3–6). James, like

²⁴ See Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John I–XII, The Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), LXXX–LXXXVI.

²⁵ See Luther, "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude" (1546 (1522)), AE 35:395-397.

²⁶ Wengert, Reading the Bible with Martin Luther, 1-21.

Jesus, was speaking not in Pauline terms of how believers find the certainty of their own salvation in Jesus, but eschatologically in terms of how God and others determine that faith is present.²⁷ Forensic justification describes the Pauline perspective that on account of Christ believers in him are declared righteous, but forensic justification can also describe the last step in the legal process of being sentenced to either eternal bliss or damnation on the last day. James provides two examples of forensic justification in this sense: Abraham sacrificing his son and Rahab providing refuge for the spies. They are recognized as being justified primarily by what they did and not only by what they confessed. At issue here is not how these two Old Testament figures knew they were justified, but how others know that they were justified. This we know by what they did. By putting his son's life at risk, Abraham was risking the promise God gave him that his descendants would be as plentiful as the stars of the heavens. Rahab risked her own life. Their faith reached completion not in the garden variety of good works that belong to Christian vocation or the silly good works of the pope, like walking through the front doors of cathedrals to merit a half-century of indulgences. Their works risked life and limb and were like the works of Christ who sacrificed his life for others. In these selfsacrificial works Christ was working and they were recognized as justified. Had Luther read James in the light of how justification was presented in the synoptic gospels, he may have seen things differently. Should it be any consolation, while Luther subjects Jesus to Pauline standards and fails, Roman Catholics in allowing works a place of the justification of the believer before God reverse the order, subordinating Paul's doctrine of justification to their misunderstanding of James.

Now to the specifics of Luther's concerns, of which the first is that James "only speaks of general faith in God."28 This flies right in the face of James 2:1: "My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" and by extension James 1:1, where Jesus is called "Lord" and "God," in terms matching the confession of Thomas. Next, Luther says James does not contain a narrative of Christ's suffering. For that matter neither does Paul, as Luther concedes, who does not go much more beyond the bare-bones creedal outline that Christ died and rose. James resembles the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) in presenting Christ's suffering and that of the church as one thing. For example, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt 5:10) bears a resemblance to "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for, when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (Jas 1:12). The accusation that James preaches only the law suggests that perhaps Luther did not recognize that such statements as the promise of a crown of life (Jas 1:12) are as much gospel as Revelation 2:10. God's promise to hear prayer offered in faith (Jas 5:15) is a passage that has an uncanny resemblance to Matthew 21:22: "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Since James speaks of dead faith, the word "faith" by itself is living. Demons have a lively

²⁷ Cf. the explanation of Jas 2:24 in Ap IV 244-253 (III 123-132).

²⁸ Luther, "Preface to James and Jude," AE 35:396.

faith fully aware of what is in store for them. For Luther to speak of the disorderly style of another writer is ironic. For the record, James takes up one topic at a time and spares us the agony of transitional sentences. Finally, in Luther's taking exception to James speaking of the law as giving liberty (Jas 1:25), he might have censured Paul for speaking of "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2). In both cases Paul and James are using the word as reference to the gospel. For Paul the law that gives life is the gospel, as it is for James, for whom the law that gives liberty is the gospel. In James' phrase, "perfect law of liberty" (Jas 2:12), he is speaking primarily not of law without moral imperfection, but of the law reaching its goal in what Christ did. This law, namely the gospel, frees the Christian to do good works. Luther in his Freedom of the Christian Man could have taken his cue from James, but of course he did not. Exaggeration serves to make the point and so this may explain Luther saying, "Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it." This might apply to Caiaphas saying it is expedient for one man to die for the people (John 11:50), but he did not know what he was saying. James did. Luther had played the Pauline justification card against James.

The title for this essay is taken from Mark 13:14. "But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," a passage for which there is no agreed interpretation. Whatever the desolating sacrilege was, it was so horrid that one should get out of town right away. Putting aside at least five other interpretations, ²⁹ I favor the view that in the abominable ugliness of Golgotha, God is manifesting himself as the God of love. Here is the last place anyone would expect to find a merciful God. By inserting the rubric, "let the reader understand," Matthew and Mark alert the lector that he is about to speak about the most incomprehensible mystery of all time.

In this essay the phrase "where it does not belong" does not refer to a historical event, but to the introduction of the doctrine of justification as a theological principle where it does not belong, as Luther did in James. We do not have the wherewithal to tackle Hebrews 6:5–6, where Luther could not come to terms with the statement that those who have fallen from the faith have no chance of returning. Jesus seems to have spoken similarly of Judas (Matt 26:24). In facing alleged problems, it might be the wiser course of action to take the writer on his own terms rather than applying the Pauline measuring stick. Then there is the matter of whether justification by faith — what Lutherans also call the Law and Gospel principle — is the only homiletical

²⁹ The options are: 1. Paul's man of lawlessness, i.e., the end-time antichrist. 2. The erection of a statue of Jupiter after the destruction of Jerusalem, where once the temple stood. 3. The aborted attempt of the Emperor Caligula to set up his own statue in the temple precincts around 40 AD. 4. The destruction of Jerusalem. 5. Bringing the Roman military standards into the temple before Jerusalem's destruction. Three things are clear: First, those who see it are to head for the hills. Second, whatever and wherever it is, it does not belong there. Third, the one reading the sacred text in the church service should take into account that he is reading something of extraordinary importance. None of these proposals for identifying the abomination of desolation fit, since with the resurrection of Jesus, Jerusalem and its temple lost their importance for Christians. Years before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies, its temple had long faded from their sight. They had heard and believed in the one who said that if "this temple" were destroyed, in three days he would raise it up (Mark 14:58; 15:29).

principle, in such a way that each sermon begins with condemning the hearer of real or fictive transgressions and concludes with a divine pardon. Coming to mind is a sermon on the servant who acquired such an enormous debt that he could have never repaid it in real time. To fit the Law-Gospel paradigm the sermon concluded that God forgives our inability or refusal to forgive others, a conclusion that flies diametrically contrary to intentions of the parable and Jesus' own interpretation of it (Matt 18:23–35), as well as to the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12, 14-15). For Lutherans, forensic justification means God's declaring the sinner free from sin; however, the word "forensic" applies to any step in the judicial process including imposition of the sentence and being taken to prison. This process Jesus outlines in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:25). One biblical writer should not be made to march to the tune of another, and Jesus (like James) should not be made to sway to the Pauline rhythm. Forty-three years have passed since the Concordia Seminary faculty majority elevated the doctrine of justification to the determinative role of what the church confesses. To reference Mark 13:14, justification was "set up where it ought not to be." In more recent disguise this has found support in the allegation that for Luther all that mattered was the faith that the "Word" created; a position hard to distinguish from gospel reductionism. The word or the gospel matters not because of itself, but because its origin is in an historical something that God accomplished in the incarnation and made accessible to us in the virgin birth, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of the man Jesus Christ. In that word, the past history of Jesus Christ is brought into the present but that history remains intact and becomes the standard for world judgment. That is a wider understanding of what forensic justification should be and is. The honor of the standard of faith, the norma normans, will forever belong to the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection, who saw and touched the word of life (1 John 1:10) and had dinner with him.



WILL THE REAL MARTIN LUTHER STAND UP?

July/October 2017

Will the Real Martin Luther Stand Up?

JULY/OCTOBER 2017

FOR worldwide Protestantism, 2017 was the equivalent of the Holy Year of Mercy, with pilgrims rushing not through Rome's bronze portals but to the Wittenberg door that once held the Ninety-Five Theses, in order to view the grave of the great reformer. The original door no longer exists, and the door episode itself may be more apocryphal than historical — one episode discussed among others by Hartmut Lehmann in "Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883–1983." Myth or not, Luther's hammer blows are still heard around the world. Nothing could be more exhilarating than singing "A Mighty Fortress" in the Castle Church where it all began.

Some years ago, a Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor was serving as a chaplain in the Castle Church when great things began to happen, or so it seemed. As he was about to conduct the prayers, he heard a choir singing the Luther hymn. These voices of the saints on earth sounded to him like voices of angels, until he learned that the mailing address of these saints was Salt Lake City, Utah. Not everyone who calls himself a saint is one, just as not everyone who claims to be a Lutheran or a Luther devotee really is. German territorial churches count as Lutherans those who do not even regard themselves as Christians. Lutheran hymns are still sung in these nonspecific confessional Evangelical German territorial churches and often in German Catholic and Baptist churches as well. In turn, confessional Lutherans make use of the Reformed hymnody. What Luther said about the true and false churches in his Lectures on Genesis applies to Lutherans today. Boundaries between the false and the true Lutheran churches are fluid, and we cannot be sure who belongs on which side of the great divide. In the shadow of the true church looms the false church.² Sadly, Luther notes that within itself, the true church has the seeds of its own self-destruction.3 As Esau's children are mixed with Jacob's children, so, too, can Luther's progeny be found in non-Lutheran communions, and Calvin's progeny in Lutheran communions. In this commemorative year, pilgrims to Wittenberg will not be of one mind. Only the judgment day will separate the chaff from the wheat. In 1983, the quincentennial of Luther's birth, the German Democratic Republic, seeing an opportunity for financial gain, produced sound explanations of the reformer's doctrine of justification. Wheat grows in strange places. Thomas Müntzer remained the reformer of choice, and

¹ Hartmut Lehmann, "Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883-1983," Lutheran Quarterly 30 (Winter 2016): 410-429.

² Jonathan D. Trigg, Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther (Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 192.

³ Martin Luther, Lectures on Genesis (1535–1536): vol. 2, p. 12, in Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/ Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE. For a discussion of three undefined boundaries of the church, see Trigg, Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther, 176–179.

the Anabaptist-inspired Peasants Revolt was considered what Luther's Reformation should have been. A milder version of this hope is still promulgated by the Reformed in the accusation that Luther was too Catholic, a thought residing in the recesses of the hearts even of some Lutherans.

In an ideal world, all Lutherans, true or false, would make the pilgrimage to Wittenberg. But for those who can't, Luther relics are on display in colleges and seminaries, as well as in museums like the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Morgan Museum in New York City. These Luther collections are the equivalent to Catholic basilicas for those who cannot make pilgrimage to Rome, or even the Reformationera Santiago de Compostela. For some, the pilgrimage to Wittenberg will be as much an affirmation of their German or Scandinavian heritage as it is an act of religious devotion.

For travelers and non-travelers alike, the Lutheran thing to do in the year 2017 was to read several books on Luther besides the old standard by Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (Concordia Publishing House, 1950), which everyone should read at least once every three years. Highly recommended is *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* by Scott H. Hendrix (Yale University Press, 2015). For nonreaders, Luther movies or documentaries are substitute forms of devotion — something like faithful Catholics saying the rosary. Intriguing is the play *Martin Luther on Trial*, in which the reformer faces a jury consisting of Hitler, Freud, and his own wife. This is nothing new. In 1961, John Osborne used the stage in his play *Luther* to psychoanalyze the reformer, who was portrayed as being uncertain about the value of the Reformation at the end of his life. This was based on Erik H. Erikson's *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, published in 1958 by W. W. Norton & Company.

A shortcut to Luther studies from one year to the next is provided in the steady supply of Luther articles, book reviews, and commentaries in the *Lutheran Quarterly*. Familiar names associated with the *Quarterly* are Oliver Olson, John T. Pless, Robert Kolb, Lawrence Rast, Mark Mattes, Carter Lindberg, and Steven Paulson, all past speakers at the annual symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary.⁵ Matthew

⁴ Here is the promotional piece advertised on the website of the Fellowship for the Performing Arts, which produced the play: "A trial for the soul of Martin Luther, and the prosecutor... is the Devil. In the new original play Martin Luther on Trial, Luther's beloved wife Katarina defends him as witnesses including Adolf Hitler, Sigmund Freud, Rabbi Josel, St. Paul, Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope Francis take the stand. Even as 2017 marks 500 years since Luther ignited the Protestant Revolt against Rome, he continues to spark intense debate. You be the judge in this witty, provocative exploration of one of history's most explosive personalities and the religious and political controversies he unleashed" ("Martin Luther on Trial," Fellowship for Performing Arts, accessed December 5, 2017, https://fpatheatre.com/production/martin-luther-on-trial).

In 1997, Oliver K. Olson of Minneapolis lectured at the Twentieth Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheran Quarterly, of which he had recently been made editor, had an ancient but less than a secure tradition reaching into the mid-nineteenth century to Evangelical Review in 1849, the Lutheran Church Review in 1882, the Augustana Quarterly in 1922, and The Lutheran Church Quarterly in 1928. In 1949, these were combined to form the Lutheran Quarterly that succumbed to journalist mortality around 1977 (Paul Rorem, "Lutheran Quarterly, Past and Future," Currents in Theology and Mission 43 [January 2016]: 10). By an act of sheer editorial strength, Olson called the Lutheran Quarterly back from its grave and staked out a claim for the old tradition. In 1997, the reconstituted Lutheran Quarterly had survived infancy, but it was not certain that it would make it through puberty. A provisional

Becker is also a familiar name. Any literary journey into Luther's life and work will be only a partial incursion into his mind, which no one scholar has fully mastered. Standard in dogmatic theology is the understanding that God, as he is in himself, is unfathomable; Luther comes in a close second. Here is a case where no one can grasp fully the reformer's thought, even on one subject. In the Autumn 2016 issue of the Lutheran Quarterly, Mary Jane Haemig offered a twenty-one page article entitled "Luther on Prayer as Authentic Communication." That ought to settle what Luther thought about prayer, but it does not. Added to the essay is a bibliography of fifteen full-length books, dating only as early as 1976, that discuss what Luther said about prayer. A shortcut to his writings is the book What Luther Says (Concordia Publishing House, 2006), in which his sayings are cataloged according to subject. At the end of 2017, the Lutherjahrbuch, a detailed bibliography published annually that lists articles and books about Luther published in the previous year, will be greatly expanded. Yet, still he remains beyond our grasp. To speak in biblical terms, of the writing of books about the great reformer there will be no end, at least so thinks the renowned Luther scholar Scott H. Hendrix.⁶ Again making use of biblical hyperbole, all the books in the world could not contain the things that have been written about Luther, and Concordia Publishing House continues to unveil translations of what he himself wrote. Had Luther lived before Abraham, the patriarch might have been directed to gaze at the books and articles written by and about the reformer to determine the number of his descendants. This is not only a quantitative frustration, but a frustration of content in coming to terms with an agreed upon composite of who Luther really was and what he thought.⁷ To rephrase Isaiah 44:15–16, every man has made a graven image of [Luther] and falls down before it and throws into the fire those parts that do not suit him.

If the most theologically influential and admired triumvirate in Christendom would be determined by the number of books written about them, it would be in this order: Jesus, Luther, and Paul.⁸ Jesus' first place is beyond challenge, but since the Enlightenment, he is disadvantaged by doubts of what we can know about him, if anything at all.⁹ Paul's name is at the head of more New Testament books than anyone else's, but his repertoire has been stripped of Ephesians, Colossians, and the

transfusion for the *Quarterly* was provided in a successful pitch for subscribers at the 1997 symposium and so the periodical was able to advance into a successful maturity.

⁶ Scott H. Hendrix, Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), x.

⁷ One such book is Kristian T. Baudler, Martin Luther's Priesthood of All Believers: In an Age of Modern Myth (New York: Oxen Press, 2016), in which he argues for a Protestant Luther who had little use for things Catholic. See also Kristian T. Baudler, "Luther's Only Common Priesthood: 1519–1523," Logia 25/4 (2016): 45–52. As Baudler's title indicates, he does not take Luther's later writings into account. For this, see Joachim Heubach, Die Ordination zum Amt der Kirche (Berlin: Lutherische Verlagshaus, 1956).

⁸ Hendrix, Martin Luther, ix.

⁹ For recent discussion of various views concerning what can be known about Jesus, see The Historical Jesus: Five Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009). The most radical view is proposed by Robert M. Price in his chapter, "Jesus at the Vanishing Point," 55–83. For an extensive collection of scholarly essays about who Jesus was and whether he existed at all, see Jesusforschung in vier Jahrhunderten: Texte von den Anstängen historischer Kritik bis zur "dritten Frage" nach dem historischen Jesus, ed. Werner Zager (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

Pastoral Epistles. His popularity survived on both sides of the East-West Schism of 1054 and the Protestant-Catholic split of the Reformation era. James proved the more useful to Rome, but Paul's doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in believers was put to good use. Several years ago, St. Peter's Cathedral in Scranton, Pennsylvania held a commemorative service to mark the two-thousandth birthday of St. Paul. Untold is how the year was determined, but it had to be June — the month in which the commemorative service was held. Blatantly Protestant-styled hymns were sung. And sections of Paul's epistles that had to do with Christ's indwelling in believers were read. Noticeably and understandably missing were Romans 3:20, "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law," and Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." It was a Catholic service, and every confession has its favored biblical books and passages. I wondered why Lutherans, with their dependency on Paul for their signature doctrine, failed to commemorate his birth. Lutherans may think they have a hold on the apostle, but they do not.

Complicating the Reformation celebration is the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), an approach to Paul's theology in which E.P. Sanders, N.T. Wright, and James Dunn propose that Luther misunderstood Paul, whose Jewish opponents held to salvation by grace. The error of these opponents is thought to be that they imposed Jewish laws on Gentile converts. Should the NPP prove to be correct, the entire Reformation enterprise would collapse and 2017 would be little more than historical commemoration. The Stephen Westerholm takes on the NPP in his essay "Did Luther Get Paul Right on Justification?" For some time, these individuals have held that Paul is responsible for corrupting the teachings of Jesus. Ironically, this has secured Paul's place in history. As one scholar aptly says, "Doubts about Paul's existence are never voiced by critics who hold him responsible for alleged evils perpetrated by the church in Jesus's name, . . . since people who never lived make poor scapegoats." Let us take this one step further. Paul can hardly be blamed for corrupting the teachings of Jesus if we cannot be sure what Jesus taught, or, for some, if he even existed. So let us put things in a row.

Reformation celebration is not only a Lutheran thing. Like brothers born of the same mother but conceived by different fathers, the Reformed cannot ignore it. They present themselves as Luther fans but hold that he did not go far enough in removing the idolatrous practices and symbols of Rome. Calvin's understanding of idolatry results in his assertion that God cannot be depicted, even in the human form — this includes that of Jesus. So also do some Lutherans prefer empty crosses to crucifixes. When it comes to justification, the Reformed are with Luther on the doctrines of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, but they compromise these doctrines by subordinating them to God's

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, The New Perspective on Paul (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹¹ Stephen Westerholm, "Did Luther Get Paul Right on Justification?" in Carl E. Braaten, ed., *Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God* (Delhi, NY: ALPB Books, 2013), 67-90.

¹² Patrick Gray, Paul as a Problem in History and Culture: The Apostle and His Critics through the Centuries (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 86. Paul's existence has been questioned (see Paul as a Problem in History and Culture, 86).

sovereignty and predestination.¹³ Secreted away in the hearts of the truly Reformed is that Ulrich Zwingli, not Luther, was the first reformer. Zwingli took umbrage at those who said he was walking in Luther's footsteps, and Luther returned the favor by not allowing Zwingli to be called his disciple.¹⁴ Like Esau and Jacob, the Reformed and the Lutherans were at odds even before the Reformation came to full term. Luther and Melanchthon did not want to meet with Zwingli in October 1529 at the Marburg Colloquy, which Philip of Hesse arranged to solve a dispute between Luther and Zwingli regarding the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Later, Luther took the argument beyond that of the sacrament in holding that the resurrected body of Jesus was present wherever God was and so confirming that Jesus' presence in bread and wine was possible. This is a position that the Reformed, beginning with Zwingli, still refuse to acknowledge. Zwingli had a static view of heaven "as a detached place to which Christ was confined" and a belief that Christ's presence in earthly elements was incomprehensible.¹⁵ Whatever issues Calvin had with Zwingli, they shared a common metaphysic that placed a gulf between spirit and matter, invisible and visible, creator and creature. Such a metaphysic then saw any human image of the divine as idolatry. It was this belief that they applied to their understanding of Christ and the sacraments. The Reformed place the Holy Spirit outside the sacraments. Luther placed the Spirit within the sacraments.16

Different beliefs about Christ and the sacraments were symptoms of fundamentally opposing worldviews. For Lutherans, "things" are necessary. For the Reformed, they are obstacles. The Reformed join the Luther celebration claiming that Calvin's doctrine of the spiritual presence in the Supper offered a mediating position between Luther and Zwingli, but this is not so. Calvin devoted a lengthy chapter in his Institutes against Luther's view that Christ's body and blood should be received by the mouth.¹⁷ He also tried to contact Luther by writing to Melanchthon, who, knowing what Luther thought of Calvin, did not tell him.¹⁸ Alliances between their followers took place after the reformer's death, when one region after another compromised Luther's distinctives. This culminated in the creation of the Evangelical Church in 1830, with one liturgy used by both Lutheran and Reformed churches. For that celebration, crucifixes were placed in the Berlin cathedral. These crucifixes still remain in the reconstructed cathedral. According to the Reformed, these are idols. So, things are not always as cut-and-dried as we would like. Calvin's religion took hold in the Netherlands, Scotland, and England, and from there moved to New England through the Puritans. From New England, it then worked its way westward throughout North

¹³ Carlos M. N. Eire, Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650 (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2016), 295, 311.

¹⁴ Eire, Reformations, 219-220

¹⁵ Hendrix, Martin Luther, 207.

¹⁶ Marc Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, tr. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 200-219.

¹⁷ John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 2:555-605.

¹⁸ Eire, Reformations, 232-235.

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Like children rejected by their father, the Reformed cannot fully rid themselves of a sublimated affection for Luther. They have a fascination with the episode of Luther drinking beer with Melanchthon and Amsdorf, when he said that God's word brought about the Reformation.²⁰ A similar episode in Calvin's life would be difficult to document. Reformed scholars regard Luther as more endearing than Calvin, who is described as just plain cold.²¹ Consider the title of the 1971 book *The Humanness of John Calvin.*²² This book raises the question of whether side-by-side images of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli in German and Austrian churches commemorate a history that never happened. In spite of their admiration for Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, the Reformed cannot fully embrace a reformer who could not fully extricate himself from Catholicism.

Reformation is also a Catholic affair. Just how successful the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was in resolving Lutheran and Catholic differences remains a matter of debate.²³ Typically, Rome takes these kinds of documents less seriously than do their co-signers. What the Catholics call justification resembles what Lutherans call sanctification, but since Lutherans are not in agreement among themselves on justification, any agreement with others is flawed at the outset. The Augsburg Confession and the Catholic Confutation showed basic agreement on what is confessed in the creeds. A joint service commemorating the start of the Reformation anniversary year was held in the cathedral in Lund. The female archbishop of Sweden presided along with Pope Francis, who took note of the gifts that have come through the Reformation. Without specification, one of these gifts could be the Counter-Reformation, and so it can be said that Luther helped the Catholic Church remove the shackles of medieval Christianity. Along with retaking lands lost to Protestants, Catholics began missionary work in the Americas and the East Indies. If we dare speak of a negative cause, the Catholic Church would not be what it is today without Luther.²⁴ On the return flight from Sweden, Francis said Rome would not ordain women priests — what a relief that was. Another intriguing event was the international symposium on Luther's teachings on the sacraments held in Rome during February 2017, sponsored by the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Luther's place in history is secure but not immune from censure. A confession

¹⁹ Eire, Reformations, 287-288.

²⁰ Luther, Eight Sermons at Wittenberg (1522), AE 51:77. This often-cited reference to Luther drinking beer is taken from a sermon delivered on March 10, 1522, the Monday after Invocavit. Luther also speaks of God working while he slept, an allusion to Mark 4:26–29, a pericope without parallel in the synoptic Gospels. "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing."

²¹ Eire, Reformations, 287. This was the view classically offered at the 2016 symposium by Carl Trueman in his essay, "Liking and Disliking Luther: A Reformed Perspective," Concordia Theological Quarterly 81/1–2 (2017): 137–151.

²² Richard Stauffer, The Humanness of John Calvin, tr. George Shriver (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

²³ See Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1999).

²⁴ Consider that in his encyclopedic *Reformations*, 367–522, Eire devotes more space to the Counter-Reformation than to Luther's.

that he pushed Humpty Dumpty off the wall and reassembled the broken shells of medieval Catholicism is unlikely. So, in this commemorative year, we have not expected the pope to pull his garments above his knees and receive the prodigal son into the church's loving arms. That would be asking too much; though it would be a nice gesture for the pope to extend the Year of Mercy by reopening the doors of St. Peter's for just a few moments to receive the great reformer back into St. Peter's fold.

Rather than speaking of the Reformation, it might be better to make use of the title of Carlos M. N. Eire's book: Reformations. 25 When asking the question "Will the real Martin Luther stand up?," we face multiple Luther resuscitations, and every man can choose the one that best fits his ideology. So, Luther becomes one size made to fit all. Frustration with what constitutes an adequate commemoration of the Reformation is expressed by Hartmut Lehmann in his commentary "The Quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation in Germany."26 For some Americans, Reformation means Germany, and the Federal Republic pulled out all the stops for the celebration. Six regional conferences were held in what was formerly the German Democratic Republic, with a festive service on May 28, 2017, in Wittenberg. Events were planned in sixty European cities. Protestants and Catholics planned joint pilgrimage to Jerusalem and special ecumenical services with the aim of healing Reformation-era memories. Lehmann asks why the Reformed churches of the Netherlands and Scotland were not asked to join, but the cloud hanging over the celebration is that the Reformation will be celebrated "in the most secularized, almost de-christianized parts of Germany, the former East."27 Communism, already deceased for nearly thirty years, still gives birth to stillborn children. Statistics for religious affiliation in Germany are dismal. Twentyseven percent belong to Protestant churches, twenty-nine percent to the Catholic Church, and thirty-four percent are nonbelievers. Of those who belong to Protestant churches, only five percent are active. In Luther's Wittenberg, less than ten percent belong to any church, let alone Luther's church. Lehmann predicts that the same fate that befell the Orthodox will fall on Germany.²⁸ To bolster up the Reformation celebration, Lehmann suggests that Baptists and Pentecostals be asked to participate.²⁹

Rapprochement would have to overcome any hard feelings for Luther's dislike of the Anabaptists.³⁰ Joint commemorations require a bit of historical amnesia. Eamon Duffy cites Jean Delumeau, a French Catholic historian, who proposes that a solution

²⁵ Supporting the argument that Zwingli was the original reformer, Eire says, "Ulrich Zwingli was preaching straight out of the Bible . . . calling into question many of the teachings and practices of the Catholic church" (*Reformations*, 219). Zwingli attributed his conversion to Erasmus sometime between 1514 and 1515 (*Reformations*, 224).

²⁶ Hartmut Lehmann, "The Quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation in Germany," Lutheran Quarterly 30 (Autumn 2016): 327-335.

²⁷ Lehmann, "The Quincentenary," 333.

²⁸ Luther, To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany (1524), AE 45:352-353: "And you Germans need not think that you will have [the gospel] forever, for ingratitude and contempt it will not make it stay."

²⁹ Lehmann, "The Quincentenary," 332-334.

³⁰ Eire, Reformations, 199-214. Modern Baptists cannot be identified with Reformation-era Baptists, but both rejected infant Baptism and rebaptized those baptized as infants.

for a common commemoration is understanding "the emergence of Protestantism and the transformation of Catholicism after Trent as twin aspects of a process of 'Christianization." By this, he meant that

both Catholic and Protestant reformers labored to replace the inherited half-pagan folk religion of late medieval Europe with something more authentically Christian, focused on the person of Christ rather than often legendary saints, prioritizing orthodox catechesis and preaching over quasi-magical ritual, and imposing religious and moral discipline on a reluctant populace.³¹

His proposal resembles the theme chosen by the LCMS for its Reformation celebration: "It's Still All about Jesus." Salvation came in Christ in the first century and was clarified in the sixteenth century. Yet, more serious negatives exist in the Reformation celebration.

Duffy notes that "The principle of *sola scriptura* and Protestantism's consequent inability to arrive at workable criteria ... contributed to the breakdown of Christendom and the emergence of a secular society." A more likely cause for secularization of the West is the philosophical humanism of the Renaissance espoused by Erasmus and passed on through Zwingli and Calvin into the Enlightenment. Benedict XVI noted that the constitution of the European Union made no reference to its Christian past. Some churches offer a morality that is often indistinct from the surrounding culture. Matters are exacerbated by biblical approaches that call into question core Christian beliefs of the creeds. Wittenberg, which bears the noble title *Lutherstadt* and is the destination of Luther pilgrims, is secularized world in miniature. As part of the Reformation celebration, Lehmann calls for an assessment of

the negative aspects of Luther's legacy, as for example the unrestrained criticism of adult baptism, the century-long polemic against Roman Catholics, and the unreflected discrimination of Jews, and by doing so clearing the way for a better future for all religions in Europe.³³

He might have added the Turks — Luther's term for Muslims. The ELCA has already apologized for what Luther said about the Jews. But Luther was not such a politically correct kind of man. He offered equal opportunity in his dislike for opponents, whether they were Jews, papists, Germans, Muslims, the pope, Henry VIII, or Duke George. Scholars will continue to come to different and contrary conclusions about who Luther was and what his meaning is for today. With his love for creation, he might even become a patron of the environmental movement someday. Today, Luther is all things to all people; yet in his time, he was not.

Organizational Lutheranism is in a state of centrifugal separation with the International Lutheran Conference (ILC), establishing an identity apart from the

³¹ Eamon Duffy, "The End of Christendom," First Things 267 (November 2016): 57, www.firstthings.com/article/2016/11/the-end-of-christendom.

³² Duffy, "The End of Christendom," 52.

³³ Lehmann, "The Quincentenary," 335.

³⁴ Lehmann, "The Quincentenary," 335.

staid Lutheran World Federation (LWF). By establishing fellowship with churches that affirm beliefs Luther emphatically rejected, the LWF has undone what Luther's distinctive doctrines on the sacraments and justification sought to accomplish.³⁵ With the LWF establishing fellowship with Reformed, Methodist, and Anglican communions, Schleiermacher's dream for a united Protestant Christendom is achieved. Lehmann goes even further by wanting to include non-Christians in the Reformation commemoration, thus creating the religious equivalent of the European Union. So, in this year of commemoration, Luther survives as a historical and cultural marker without the annoying edges that his children find embarrassing. Within the context of contemporary biblical studies, Luther's theology is no longer viable. But by ignoring the conclusions of contemporary biblical studies, confessionally minded Lutherans can join Luther scholars who do not share their confessional commitment. So, the sixteenth-century bubble becomes a self-contained canon and no one need be concerned if Luther scholars hold to Jesus' resurrection.

The North American Lutheran Church (NALC) was formed by congregations opposed to the moral direction of the ELCA. A convocation was held recently on the Law and the Gospel, but chiefly on the law.³⁶ In his introduction to the published essays from this convocation, Carl Braaten laments "the downhill slide of Lutheranism into antinomianism" at Lutheran seminaries and claims, "Neglect and misinterpretation of the Law-Gospel paradigm led to unintended consequences."37 This is a not-so-slightly veiled reference to ELCA decisions and even to theologians associated with the NALC. Braaten observes, "Too many of us abrogated our confessional teaching on law and gospel, and carried on as though Lutherans who love the 'gospel' must at the same time be enemies of the law."38 Braaten is not speaking of the Law-Gospel controversy of the 1960s and 1970s at the St. Louis seminary, whose faculty majority made the gospel — defined as the proclamation of forgiveness — the only theological standard. Insistence on the historical content of the Bible was not necessary as long as the gospel was proclaimed. That approach and the Law-Gospel paradigm Braaten has in mind agree that the essential element in theology is the gospel, which relieves the sinner from the predicament of sin. Braaten cuts to the heart of the matter in asking whether "Lutherans who love the 'gospel' must at the same time be enemies of the law." 39 So, in this paradigm, the real issue is the role of the law in theology. Uncontested is the role of the Law and the Gospel in preaching, but David S. Yeago rightly "contest[s] the view that the distinction and opposition of law and gospel constitutes the last horizon of Christian belief, that the opposition of law and gospel to one another is

³⁵ Luther wrote A Short Catechism on the Lord's Supper, which Eire reports was seen as a "savage' blast against all Reformed theologians." Calvin had hoped to use Melanchthon as intermediator with Luther, but knowing Luther's temperament, Melanchthon did not share Calvin's correspondence with him (Reformations, 287).

³⁶ It was held on August 15–16, 2012, in Golden Valley, Minnesota and the essays were published in Carl E. Braaten, ed., Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God.

³⁷ Braaten, "Law and Gospel: The Hallmark of Classical Lutheranism," in Preaching and Teaching, 17.

³⁸ Braaten, "Law and Gospel," 17.

³⁹ Braaten, "Law and Gospel," 17.

the prime structuring principle."⁴⁰ The opposition of the Law and Gospel in preaching may be indispensable, but as Yeago affirms, it "is *not* the principle in terms of which Christian belief hangs together."⁴¹ Theologians who propose a program in which the gospel eliminates the law are receiving a warm welcome from those who are otherwise recognized as conservatives. In this approach, "The law oppresses *because it is law*, that is, because it is an ordered demand, a requirement, a command. The law oppresses because of the kind of word it is, not because of the situation in which we encounter it... Salvation [then] is [seen as] liberation from form and order and the law's cruel demand for them."⁴² A symptom of this Law-Gospel theology is the oft-repeated claim that the third use of the law as set forth in the Formula of Concord originates with Melanchthon, not Luther, and that it resembles Calvin's definition.⁴³ In *Reading the Bible with Luther*, Timothy J. Wengert provides an extensive argument against what he calls "the 'notorious' third use of the law" among Lutherans.⁴⁴

A second symptom of this Law-Gospel theology is the elevation of the Latin phrase lex semper accusat (Ap IV 38) to an absolute theological principle. One cannot fail to note the irony in the fact that in 1531, Melanchthon's position about the law as accusation was made the standard for theology, but then just three years later, he became the villain for offering a Calvin-like definition of the third use of the law. In this Law-Gospel program, after the law condemns the sinner, it is eliminated from the theological task. The battle cry for the lex semper accusat position could be a variation of Cato's Carthago delenda est — that is, lex delenda est, "the law must be destroyed." In this approach, faith relies on the proclaimed word and not on such concrete "things" outlined in the creeds like the virgin birth and the resurrection. Gospel liberates from hearing the law at all.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," in Pro Ecclesia 2/1 (1993): 38.

⁴¹ Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," 39. Italics original.

⁴² Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," 40-41. Italics original.

⁴³ The organizing committee of the NALC for the symposium on the law and the gospel "invited Dr. Piotr Malysz to address the thorny issue of the third use of the law, giving due consideration to both the freedom of the gospel in Christ and obedience to the commandments of God in the Christian life" (Braaten, "Law and Gospel," 15). Malysz notes that "The Formula's blindness to the christological renewal of the Christian is one reason for its turn to the law in search of a rationale for, and structure of, Christian obedience" (Piotr J. Malysz, "Freedom and Obedience in the Christian Life," in Preaching and Teaching, 133). He goes on to attribute to the Formula a position that resembles Calvin's. "The law is brought in because, as it turns out, the gospel is unable to touch one's entire being, part of which must now be admonished and prodded by means of the law" ("Freedom and Obedience," 133). He correctly observes that the Formula does not present the gospel as the law fulfilled by Christ, and this may be a hindrance in having a less than positive view of the law. He favors the view proposed by the late William Lazareth, who, in place of a third use of the law, offers a second use of the gospel called "the second or parenetic use of the Gospel," described as a shadow of the life Christians must follow, but in which they dare not trust ("Freedom and Obedience," 135-136). Paraenesis, a term used by Pauline scholars of advice given in the epistles, avoids, perhaps deliberately so, imposing the Law-Gospel distinction on biblical imperatives. The end result of this proposal is a confusion of the law and the gospel, a loss of the proper distinction. Although Malysz does not explicitly say that the second use of the gospel is a replacement for the third use of law, this is what it is. Malysz can hardly attribute to the law a third use, since he holds that the law is an overwhelming negative critiqued by the gospel. This is the same view proposed by Forde and Paulson.

⁴⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, Reading the Bible with Luther (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 37-39.

⁴⁵ Yeago locates the origin of this thinking in Paul Tillich's Protestant principle that grace appears in finite forms without being identical to any particular form (Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, tr. James Luther Adams [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948], 212; Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," 45).

With good reason, Yeago calls this approach Gnosticism followed by antinomianism, which is, after all, Braaten's concern.

By itself, the Law-Gospel becomes its own Gnosticism, and a more damaging antichrist than the papacy. In saying "Lutherans who love the 'gospel' must at the same time be enemies of the law,"46 Braaten could have any number of theologians in mind. But it fits Stephen D. Paulson, who, in Lutheran Theology, says that for Luther, "Where Christ is preached as crucified for our sins and sakes, the law comes to an end."47 This view reappears in his article in the Reformation 2016 issue of Logia — a publication that presents itself as "A Journal of Lutheran Theology." To advance his argument that the gospel replaces the law, Paulson shifts to the civil realm that will be replaced by the gospel in the new kingdom.⁴⁸ This shift also takes place for Paulson in theology. He proposes that the legal scheme offered by second generation Lutherans "forced a series of unsuccessful theories of atonement that brought Christ's 'work' on the cross under the confines of the law."49 "Unsuccessful theories of the atonement" are not identified but are those discussed by Paulson's mentor Gerhard O Forde: "1) the vicarious satisfaction idea; 2) the victory idea (that Christ won the victory over all man's adversaries) and 3) the idea that Christ was an inspiring example."50 In determining the value of Christ's death, Paulson does not allow for the idea that compensation or payment is made to the devil, the law, or God. He never tires of repeating his aversion to the idea of payment, especially payment to God.⁵¹ Forde is even more vehement in his dismissal of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, saying that it fosters the false idea that God can be bought off and that we cannot know if Christ has paid enough.⁵² As if this was not enough, Forde claims that divinity and suffering are so distinct that the idea of the God-Man offering up a sacrifice is questionable.53 While it would be hard to find anyone who now holds that Christ made payment to Satan to redeem lost souls, Paulson, like Forde, has his sights on the vicarious satisfaction by which Christ offers himself as payment to God. This is the view known as the Anselmic or Latin theory of the atonement and is the one that Paul Althaus attributed to Luther.⁵⁴ Marc Lienhard also affirms that Luther held to Christ's death as a payment for sin.55 Paulson wants to distance Luther and himself from what he calls "unsuccessful theories of atonement,"

⁴⁶ Braaten, "Law and Gospel," 17.

⁴⁷ Steven D. Paulson, Lutheran Theology, Doing Theology (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 4.

⁴⁸ Steven D. Paulson, "The Simul and the Two Kingdoms," Logia 25/4 (2016): 17-26.

⁴⁹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 88-89.

⁵⁰ Gerhard O. Forde, Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 41.

⁵¹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 91.

⁵² Forde, Where God Meets Man, 11-12.

⁵³ Forde, Where God Meets Man, 11-13.

^{54 &}quot;Luther, like Anselm, views Christ's work in terms of satisfaction. Christ must bring a satisfaction to God for our sins" (Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C. Schultz [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], 202).

^{55 &}quot;The law cannot be overcome unless it is first fulfilled, but just like the wrath of God, it must also be undergone as punishment. This punishment Jesus Christ has suffered for us, in our place" (Marc Lienhard, Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ, tr. Edwin H. Robertson [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982], 281).

especially the vicarious satisfaction.⁵⁶ However, in speaking of Christ destroying Satan and evil forces, he borrows heavily from the *Christus Victor* theory of Gustaf Aulén.⁵⁷ Paulson makes a rarely seen move in associating Albrecht Ritschl's moral theory of atonement with the third use of the law by claiming both views hold that the law is eternal. For Paulson, the law is not eternal and cannot be identified with God. "Obedience to the Father and obedience to the law are two different things... God and the law are not the same; he uses the law as a tool with a definite purpose in mind." Since the law does not belong to who God is — that is, to his nature — Paulson follows his own logic that law is not eternal. This raises the question of whether God is moral. If he is moral, in what sense is this so? If God and law are not the same, does God then prescribe a moral standard for man that has little or no resemblance to his own? To make short of a controverted issue, the phrase *lex semper accusat* is misappropriated to defend a view that eliminates the law from Christian life. All three theologians — Gerhard Forde, Timothy Wengert, and Stephen Paulson — present their positions as Luther's and are received as such by many identifiably confessional Lutherans.⁶⁰

Perhaps in response to misunderstandings over lex semper accusat, the Formula of Concord specifies that because of and after the fall, "God's law accuses and condemns human nature and the human person" (FC SD I 6).61 The law accuses only because, and in so far as, man is a sinner. It did not accuse Adam while he lived in a state of moral perfection, nor does it accuse Christians as they are regenerated in Christ. Those who die in Christ are also free from the accusations of the law. In his explanations of the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism. Luther does not limit the law as accusation against sin but sees it as a description of Christian life. For example, "You shall not murder" combats the obverse of assisting the neighbor to retain a life given to him by God's act of creating him. The life that man possesses by being made in God's image originated with the Father who possesses life in himself — a life that he shares eternally with the Son and the Spirit. Thus the Fifth Commandment, like all the commandments, originated in God's Trinitarian existence (Gen 1:26; John 5:26; 6:63). Murder is not simply an offense against divinely given code of law, but it is also an affront to the God who is life and who gives life. So, for the believer, the positive and original side of the Fifth Commandment is that the believer engages in the divine

⁵⁶ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 89.

^{57 &}quot;It is true that Christ pays debt, suffers punishment, and pays ransom to the old lords of this world, but not to let the legal scheme rule" (Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 91). This seems to be line with the old classical view that Christ paid a ransom to Satan.

⁵⁸ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 174-175.

⁵⁹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 104, 202.

⁶⁰ For a succinct and adequate critique of Forde, see Jack D. Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," Concordia Theological Quarterly 76/3–4 (2012): 269–273.

⁶¹ All quotations from the Lutheran Confessions in this article are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* tr. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

act of helping his neighbor retain and improve his life.⁶² The Apology, from which the oft-cited *lex semper accusat* is taken, also says,

We do not abolish the law, Paul says [Rom. 3:31], but we establish it, because when we receive the Holy Spirit by faith the fulfillment of the law necessarily follows, through which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit continually grow. (Ap XX 15)

The commandments are not arbitrary prohibitions imposed by a sovereign deity but a description of what God is in himself and how he created his rational creatures. Negatives in the law with threats of punishment for forbidden behaviors, such as in the first and second uses, are adjustments of the law so that man can be retrained from overt evil and realize his condition. Law functions as accusation, but, in itself, it remains good. Even the law's threats are acts of divine mercy, without which we would never know our fallen condition and would therefore be forever lost. Only in the condition of sin does law become for God *opus alienum* and for the hearer *lex accusat*. In response to Melanchthon emphasizing repentance over sin and Agricola emphasizing forgiveness, Luther

presented the Ten Commandments as both prohibitions of sinful behavior and encouragement of the opposite: the correct way to honor God and treat others. The Small Catechism begins not with threat but a call to faith and each commandment begins with "we are to fear and love God" and followed by a prohibition and a positive instruction.⁶³

Though it is pedagogically cliché to say Luther's catechism follows a Law-Gospel outline,64 the presupposition of the commandments is nothing else but faith. The commandments are not addressed to unbelievers, but to believers. Therefore, their prohibitions are boundaries showing from where believers came and where they dare not return — but of course they do. The other side of the law's prohibitions are the commandments in their primordial form as indicatives of what Adam once was and what Christians are now in Christ. Wengert, Forde, and Paulson see law intrinsically as enemy and cannot allow for any positive use of the law in Christian life. Hence, no third use of the law. For them, the law is a self-contained, autonomous, negative, evil "thing" that was not overcome by the atonement but conquered in the believer's life by proclaiming the gospel. This Law-Gospel proposal is a theology of the word in the extreme and shares in the same fundamental principle of the St. Louis faculty majority of the 1970s. In response, law and gospel are not in themselves "things" but have to do with our relationship to the "things" set forth in the creeds: God's trinitarian life; Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection; the church; and eternal life. These are the things of substance that must be believed. Law in its three uses does not have to do with three different things or three different kinds of laws but with how one

⁶² For a fuller development of this argument, see my "Sanctification," Concordia Journal 41/3 (2015): 236-249.

⁶³ Hendrix, Martin Luther, 196-197.

⁶⁴ David Aaron Fiala, "Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 86/4 (2016): 24.

law functions in three different situations. Gospel is the proclamation of how God has relieved the dilemma in which the sinner finds himself under the condemnation of the law, the lex semper accusat. The gospel then puts him in a new relationship with God so that he knows and does the good things that are required by the law and that Christ did. Law and gospel are the lenses through which the "things" in the creeds are presented to man first as a sinner and then as a saint. Without the things of the creed, the gospel is an empty proclamation and promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation and yet is capable of delivering such gifts. Without the things, faith has nothing to rely on.⁶⁵

Formula VI does not say everything that must be said about the third use of the law. Left undeveloped is the Christological component that the good works of faith are the works Christ does through believers. So, the Formula slips gears from the third to the second use, law as accusation. It appears, then, that lex semper accusat is what the law is all about. Since man is quantitatively more sinner than saint, law as accusation is its chief function. But this is not the law's first, last, original, or essential function as it exists in God. Sin does not define the law's essence, that is, how the law exists in God. Until these distinctions are grasped, the door stays open to the antinomianism that Braaten decries in contemporary Lutheran theology and church life. In the face of the moral disorder that follows the denial of the third use of the law, Calvin's view — threats working alongside the gospel prodding Christians to do good works - will be attractive to those who want the immediate results that the law produces. 66 Sadly, in the half-millennium celebration of the Reformation, Lutherans are less likely to agree on his core doctrine of Law and Gospel. In identifying the real Luther who will stand up, scholars will continue to offer different options. It is left unresolved, much like the question of whether the ghost of Samuel conjured by the witch of Endor was really the prophet or a satanically fabricated apparition. Thus, the search for the real Luther continues, just as the search for historical Jesus continues with some biblical scholars.

⁶⁵ The unintended father of the Law-Gospel theology is Werner Elert, who properly noted that law and gospel, that is, justification, bound the articles of the Augsburg Confession together. However, they are not the content of theology. Yeago takes note that Elert came up against a blank wall with the first article of the Augsburg Confession, which demanded faith in the triune God quite apart from the Law-Gospel paradigm. He expresses his frustration in that "the decree of the Nicene Synod concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three Persons is true and must be believed without doubting" (Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," 43). Elert's own verdict is that "here the ship of the Reformation, which has just recently departed from land, seems to be sailing back into the harbor of the medieval church, which produced laws of faith and demanded obedience to them. Faith itself, the most precious treasure, seems to be betrayed!" (Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism: The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, tr. Walter A. Hansen [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962], 200–202).

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of this theology, see Scott R. Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), esp. 167-200.



IS LAW INTRINSIC TO GOD'S ESSENCE?

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Is Law Intrinsic to God's Essence?

JANUARY/APRIL 2018

CONCERN has been brewing in some Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) circles over antinomianism. Antinomianism is a term broad enough to embrace libertinism, the idea that Christians can do whatever they want. Antinomianism questions the function of the law in Christian life, a locus in dogmatics known as sanctification and discussed in the Formula of Concord, article VI, under the heading "The Third Use of the Law." For the record, there is only one moral law with three functions, not three laws. To say it another way, it is one law with three appearances, depending on the situation. Those questioning the third use hold that the law is addressed to Christians as sinners but has no place in their life of faith. Law is seen as one huge negative, an overwhelming "No," and like an autoimmune disorder, law eventually turns on itself to self-destruct; it does not belong to God's essence and is not eternal.

THE NEW "THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS" AND THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW"

Deniers of the law's third use have arrogated to themselves the well-known phrase "the theology of the cross," which actually means that those who become Christians should expect to suffer with and for Christ. While this phrase may be part of the paradigm of the new definition of the law, its striking feature is that the law has no function for faith. Those not acquainted with this proposal (denying the law's third use under the moniker "theology of the cross") may easily think that it is Luther's theology. It is not, and it is this issue that we want to address. To avoid confusing this new proposal with what Luther taught, we will refer to the new proposal with quotation marks as the new "theology of the cross."

Those who identify with the new "theology of the cross" also march under a banner inscribed with *lex semper accusat* ("the law always accuses"), words excised from the Apology.⁴ Law as accusation exhausts its function; for the new "theology of the

¹ Thus, the three uses of the law are uses of the one moral law. The Lutheran Confessions (Ap IV [II] 6, in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], 108, hereafter Tappert) and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition also recognize three kinds of Old Testament law: moral, ceremonial, and civil. See Luther's preface to the Old Testament (1523), vol. 445, pp. 243–244, in Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

² This suggestion is offered by Bernd Wannenwetsch of Basel, Switzerland. See my discussion of this in Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace, ed. John R. Stephenson (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2008), 62–69.

³ See the classic book, Gerhard O. Forde, On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 108–109: "The temptation is always to fall back on the law, either in its original sense or perhaps in some new sense like 'third use.' But the theologian of the cross knows that there is no way back."

⁴ Ap IV (III) 46, 164 (= Ap IV 167, 285, Tappert, 130, 150); XII (V) 88 (Tappert, 195); cf. Ap IV (III) 136 (= Ap IV 257, Tappert, 144); XII (V) 34 (Tappert, 186), where the law "only" accuses in certain situations.

cross," function determines the Law's essence. Put another way, it argues back from the effect to the cause. Since the law unveils sin, in its essence, it accuses.

While the LCMS accepts the entire Book of Concord, some Lutheran churches do not accept the Formula, where the law's third use is defined. Thus, one might argue that its denial is of little consequence, that is, until one realizes that the law, with no function for the life of faith of believers, also has no role in understanding God, with the result that Christ's sufferings and death cannot be seen as an atonement for sin and for the penalties that the law imposes. Ironically, the Apology, from which *lex semper accusat* is taken, provides this excellent description of what came to be called the third use. "We do not overthrow the law, Paul says (Rom. 3:31), but uphold it; for when we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit gradually increase." Luther scholar Timothy J. Wengert goes as far as speaking of "the 'notorious' third use of the law" among Lutherans.

CHRIST AS THE "END OF THE LAW"

Steven Paulson's denial of the third use relies on an idiosyncratic and false interpretation of Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law" that is, that Christ terminates the law. Yet, Robert Jewett in the Hermenia commentary series of Fortress Press says that this passage "should not be understood in this context as cessation and termination" but "as 'fulfillment' or 'goal,' which means that the teleological perspective remains primary in this verse." It "has a directional sense that explains how Christ is the goal of the law." It does not refer to the law's cessation as proposed by the late and still influential Luther Seminary professor Gerhard O. Forde and by his disciples Timothy Wengert, James Nestingen, Steven Paulson, and, more recently, Nicholas Hopman. In accusing sinners, the law has outlived its function and so, for faith, has

⁵ Ap XX 15 (Tappert, 229).

⁶ For a lengthy argument against the third use, see Timothy J. Wengert, Reading the Bible with Martin Luther (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 37–39.

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁸ Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman, "Christ, the Hated God," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2016): 1–27, here at 1, 6. Paulson places this interpretation in the introduction to his Lutheran Theology and claims it as Luther's position. "For Luther the break-through of the gospel is that where Christ is preached as crucified for our sins and sake, the law comes to an end. That is the central point of Paul's letter to the Romans (10:4): 'Christ is the end of the law'" (Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* [London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2011], 4).

⁹ Robert Jewett, Romans: A Commentary, Hermeneia, ed. Eldon Jay Epp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 619.

¹⁰ Jewett, Romans, 619-620.

¹¹ James Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," in *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law* and Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 169–184. Nestingen acknowledges Forde's influence (175) and speaks of the termination of the law (170).

¹² Paulson and Hopman, "Christ, the Hated God," 1–27; Nicholas Hopman, "The Heidelberg Disputation; April 26, 1518," Lutheran Quarterly 31, no. 4 (2017): 436–444; Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman, "Atonement," in Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 48–51.

no purpose. ¹³ Paulson reinforces his untenable interpretation of Romans 10:4 as proof for the law's extinction by advising readers to consult Paul before preaching on the Gospels, thus encouraging preachers to read the Gospels not on their own terms but through the lens of his misunderstanding of Paul's words "the end of the law." ¹⁴ But is the law inherently accusatory, and need we consult Paul to understand Jesus?

THE THIRD USE OF THE ETERNAL LAW

In Eden, Adam's moral nature corresponded to the law implanted in creation. It was without accusation. The command not to eat of the tree was not a legal prescription but a test of Adam's faith and love for God. By disregarding God's command, he gave birth to the law's second use; but in the next life, the law's third use will be its chief and only use. We will do the things God wants from our hearts, without fear of accusation. When the Formula states that the law reminds Christians that their good works are still impure (FC SD VI 20–21), the law's third use can soon be seen by some as the flip side of the second use. Piotr Malysz notes that "the third use of the Law is frequently little more than the second without a 'sting,' with salvation serving as a catalyst." In this fallen world, accusation is the law's chief function, but this does not translate into being its original, final, or now its only purpose. Law does not come to an end by self-destruction, as proposed by Forde and his disciples. As confessed in the Formula of Concord (FC SD II 50), *lex est aeterna* ("the law is eternal").

When the mantra of *lex semper accusat* is taken out of its context in the Apology, it takes on the status of a theological trump card, denying any function to the law but accusation. Seeing law as only accusation disqualifies it as a guide of Christian behavior. Hence, no third use of the law is left. Christians will never be perfect in this life, and the law reminds them that even their good works are impure (FC SD VI 21), but in Christ they are already free from the law's accusations. This is what *simul iustus et peccator* is all about. The law's third use is nothing other than the Ten Commandments Christologically fulfilled, informed, and defined. Believers do Christ's works, which God through his Spirit works in them (Phil 2:13). Works of the law's third use are trinitarian

¹³ Paulson, "Christ, the Hated God," 1. Also cited in support of the view that law has come to end is John 1:17, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." At face value, it could be taken to contrast the law with the gospel, but William C. Weinrich, John 1:1–7:1, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 119, 187–191, points out that it contrasts the written revelation of Torah to the superior one in God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. See also Rudolf Bultmann, The Gospel of John: A Commentary, tr. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 78–79. Simply put, John 1:17 is not a law and gospel passage. Ironically, Gerhard Forde, on whom Paulson is dependent, correctly uses the Greek word τέλος when he says, "The Word and sacraments are themselves the end (telos), the purpose of it all" (Theology Is for Proclamation [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 35). The public Office of the Ministry is also described as the telos of all offices (181). In both places, Forde uses the word telos in the proper sense of purpose and completion and not as annihilation, as Paulson does.

¹⁴ Paulson, "Christ, the Hated God," 9. "So true preaching is learned from Paul before one ventures into the lengthy gospels without being tempted with displacement, which is original sin's repeated failure in telling the story of Jesus Christ."

¹⁵ Piotr J. Malysz, "The Third Use of the Law in Light of Creation and the Fall," in *The Law in Holy Scripture*, ed. Charles A. Gieschen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 215.

through and through. Believers' good works are not only patterned after what Christ did, but are also what Christ does in them. Good works are those of the third use and have their origin in God's trinitarian existence, in which each divine person loves the other with a perfect love (John 5:20). This love manifests perfectly in God offering up Christ as a sacrifice to satisfy the law's demands and suffer its accusations (John 3:16). Trinitarian love that expresses itself in Christ's life and atoning death — his active and passive obedience — comes to further expression in believers who live and die for others (John 15:12–13, 17; 1 John 4:7). That's the third use in a nutshell.

Our response to the misunderstanding of lex semper accusat is this: law is intrinsic to God's essence and is reflected in everything he does. Law exists eternally in God and is the first or original revelation of God. Law is what God is, which is to say that goodness and love is what God is. The moral law is not an arbitrary morality or system of ethics imposed on sinners by a capricious deity. Since without the law, the gospel cannot be understood or believed, law's primacy within God is affirmed by the gospel and not abolished or negated. By Christ fulfilling the law, he does not terminate it, as proposed by the new "theology of the cross," but affirms it. Law and gospel are both perfect revelations of God but in different ways. Law is what God is eternally in himself and gospel is his gracious response to our disregard of who and what God is. Jesus summed up the law in the commands to love God and the neighbor (Matt 22:37-39). This love originates in the trinitarian relationship in which each divine person loves the other with a perfect love, out of which relationship emerges the command to love the neighbor (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7- 21). Love of the neighbor is descriptive of the God who shows his love to us as his neighbors. By creating us and then by rescuing us from our sin, he loved us with an undeserved love. Before asking us to love him and our neighbors, God fulfills his own command to love. Luther's explanation of the first commandment — that we should fear, love, and trust in him above all things — is a call to faith and assumes faith.16 Each of the Ten Commandments is addressed not to unbelievers but to believers who, in spite of the constant danger of falling into sin, are to live their lives in doing the good works that Christ did. By each of the last nine commandments, which Luther begins explaining by saying, "We should fear and love God," faith is assumed and becomes the source of the good works required of believers. These are the works of the law's third use.

Systematizing theology into separate *loci* can lead to thinking that one doctrine can be separated from another, thus resulting in disconnected abstract truths. Such a situation then allows the law's third use to be detached from the doctrines of Christ and God, as done by the new "theologians of the cross." The Scriptures are not written in this atomistic way, but each doctrine is presented in, with, and under all the others. What Jesus taught was an extension of who he was and what he did. For example, Christ's blood offered to the Father as a sacrifice is the same blood given in the Sacrament (Matt 26:28). To take this one step further, the sacrificial character of

¹⁶ See also the Large Catechism: "The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence in God" (LC I 4; Tappert, 365).

Christ's death comes to expression in Christians living and dying for others, as Jesus proposed to James and John (Matt 20:26–28). That is the third use of the law. Christ's humiliation — not using his deity for his own benefit — reaches out into the lives of believers, who are not to regard others as superior to themselves (Phil 2:1–11). By sacrificing himself to the Father, Christ assumes the law's accusations to himself and transforms the law's second use into the third use, which is nothing other than the extension of his life (Christology) into the lives of believers. The Samaritan in Luke's parable is a description first of Christ and then of believers (Luke 10:30–37). Martyrdom is the perfect expression of the law's third use. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

THE ETERNAL LAW AND THE ATONEMENT

"Soft antinomianism," a recently coined term associated with the new "theology of the cross," comes across as benign, but any denial of the third use, small or catastrophic, is symptomatic of a structural flaw in how God, Christ, and the atonement are understood and corrupts the entire theological enterprise. Foundational for this theological restructuring is the denial of the *lex aetema*. Since for Forde, Paulson, and Nestingen, law is defined by its accusatory function and does not belong to God's essence, it is not eternal and will pass away.¹⁷ Still left to be answered is where or with whom the law originated. In "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," Stephen Hultgren explains how J. C. K. von Hofmann (1810–1877) answers this question in his *Heilsgeschichte* theology. Hofmann articulated essential elements appearing one century later in the new "theology of the cross," such as understanding Christ's death as an expression of God's love for the world and not as propitiation.¹⁸ For Hofmann,

The Law is an interim measure . . . of God's overall plan to realize his love for humanity. In a certain sense, the Law is only a consequence of humanity's fall into sin and of God's wrath. God's wrath is not directed at human failure objectively to live up to God's standard as revealed in the Law. Rather, His wrath was due to the fact the humanity has turned away from him. 19

For Hofmann, as for Forde and the new "theologians of the cross" after him, law is God's response to humanity's breaking union with him. Since law is not intrinsic to God's essence, Christ's death is no longer seen as a sacrifice for offenses against the law.20 In Hofmann's scheme (adopted by Forde), atonement no longer takes place between the Father and the Son but between God and believers when they hear God's

¹⁷ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 224. "The law remains eternally, but it is not an eternal law in the sense of ruling or making any demands of Christians—nor is it the very mind of God itself." In this explanation of the Greek word τέλος, Nestingen understands fulfillment of the law as termination ("Speaking of the End to the Law," 170).

¹⁸ Stephen Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," in *The Necessary Distinction*, 197-199.

¹⁹ Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," 199.

²⁰ Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," in Christian Dogmatics, vol. 2, ed. Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 47–49; Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," 199.

word of forgiveness in the preaching. Forde calls this "a reversal in direction," so that "atonement occurs when God succeeds in getting through to us who live under wrath and law."²¹ What Forde confidently labels "Luther's Theology of the Cross" is not actually a doctrine of the atonement but a malformed theory of justification posing as a doctrine of atonement.²² Inherent in Hofmann's redefinition of atonement is a particular form of dispensationalism — the belief, still popular among some Evangelicals, that God works differently in different periods of time (called "dispensations"). For Hofmann, law has a function only until the gospel comes. In the new "theology of the cross," when faith is created, the law has outlived its purpose.

The inclusion of the law's third use in Formula of Concord VI is regarded as a Calvinist intrusion into Lutheran theology, which was first introduced by Melanchthon in 1534. Not explained is how Melanchthon provided the battle cry *lex semper accusat* in the Apology in 1531 and then only three years later was considered responsible for introducing the third use of the law into Lutheran theology.23 Arguments advancing the new "theology of the cross" are just as likely to reference Luther as they do the Scriptures, perhaps even more so. It presents itself at least as a culturally Lutheran Reformation theology. During the Reformation quincentennial, the new "theology of the cross" garnered additional support; it is claimed to represent what Luther actually believed.²⁴

Although the new "theology of the cross" cannot be equated with Gustaf Aulén's Christus Victor theory, but has popular in the last century, it has taken over its terms in describing Christ's death as a conflict with demonic forces. Yet, there is an important difference: for the new "theology of the cross," the conflict is not a cosmic, interstellar one, as it was for the Gnostics and Manicheans, but an internal existential conflict that Christians experience. In letting themselves be justified by God, believers are freed from having to justify themselves. Forde understands law not as *lex aeterna b*ut as "a generalized existential dread experienced by human beings in the old, evil age." According to his scheme, he cannot define the gospel as a fulfillment of the law, since this would make the gospel subservient to the law. This view, which is

²¹ Forde, "The Work of Christ," in Christian Dogmatics 2:47.

²² Forde's restructuring of the doctrine of atonement into a malformed doctrine of justification has been adopted by Wengert, Nestingen, Paulson, and Hopman and is promoted in *Lutheran Quarterly* and now in the *Concordia Journal*. See Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 175; Joel P. Meyer, "Justification as the Ground and Goal of the Christian Life in Luther's Catechisms," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 4 (2017): 43–57.

²³ Wengert, Reading the Bible with Martin Luther, 38.

²⁴ Paulson makes this clear in his introduction to Lutheran Theology, 4. (See note 8, above.)

²⁵ Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

²⁶ Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:36–41. Paulson follows Forde in seeing the atonement existentially as taking place within the believer and not as a cosmic battle, which he describes as Manichaeism (Steven Paulson, "A Royal Ass," in *The Necessary Distinction*, 270–272). See also Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 131–133. In that theology, atonement affects a change in us, not in God.

²⁷ Jack D. Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law: A Confessional Lutheran Critique," Concordia Theological Quarterly 75, nos. 1-2 (2011): 153. See also Scott Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 128.

unacceptable in his sight, is found in Lutheran Orthodoxy, in which the doctrine of the law was essential for its doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement. Justice and mercy cannot be given equal standing in God. This is reason enough for Forde to reject the Lutheran Orthodox view of the atonement, which requires that God's justice and mercy be balanced into one act.²⁸

EXISTENTIALISM AND THE NEW "THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS"

The new "theology of the cross" is a theology of justification and neoorthodoxy is a theology of revelation. In spite of their differences, one can hardly fail to recognize similarities. Both focus on the oral word, in other words, preaching as a present reality that is not grounded on past events. Historical critique of the biblical reports does not play a prominent part. Both proposals are based on existentialism.²⁹ The title of Forde's book *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* speaks volumes.

The extra nos element that is so essential to the Lutheran orthodox doctrine of reconciliation and justification — that these take place outside of us — is neglected or explicitly denied by the new "theology of the cross." Reconciliation and justification are placed instead in the preached word. Objectivity is found in the word or the promise and not in any act or apart from the faith created by the word. In this scheme, there is no place for what is called "objective justification" in Lutheran dogmatics — that, in raising Jesus from the dead, God forgave the sins of the entire world. Justification in the new "theology of the cross" is no more than a subjective, existential experience taking place in a person when he responds to the gospel or the promise. Word or proclamation is the ultimate reality behind or under which there is no external substructure either in history or in God. Absolution is the ultimate form of the word addressed to the believer. Absolution is even defined by Nestingen as the atonement: "[Christ] enters the conscience through the absolution, through the proclaimed Word and the administered Sacrament to effect the forgiveness of sin. This is the true substitutionary atonement, happening here and now."30 There is good reason to challenge Nestingen's claim that this is Luther's view.31

In a dictionary entry coauthored with Hopman, Paulson denies that the atonement is Christ offering himself to God,³² saying, "Therefore righteousness does not win the victory over sin in Christ's obedient death on the cross by making a payment for sin to the law (as in the [Lutheran] orthodox system). Instead, righteousness defeats sin in Christ's resurrection."³³ Paulson's view is at odds with Romans 4:25: "[Jesus] was put

²⁸ Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:25. "Christ suffers the punishment due us under divine wrath. Punishment and satisfaction are more less equated."

²⁹ Forde, Theology Is for Proclamation, 35. "The concrete moment of proclamation is the doing of the mighty act of God in the living present. It is not a recital of past acts, but the doing of the act itself now."

³⁰ Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 174.

³¹ Marc Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, tr. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 280–286. See also 381, "There, Luther describes Christ, who is delivered up to the wrath of the Father, bearing the punishment deserved by sinful humanity and reconciling God and humankind."

³² Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 48-51.

³³ Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51. See also Forde, "The Work of Christ," in Christian Dogmatics 2:25.

to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."34 Here, justification is a result of the atonement and not a substitute for it. Paulson also sets forth his denial of the atonement in his Lutheran Theology35 and in The Necessary Distinction.36 Again, in the new "theology of the cross," atonement is no longer seen as God sacrificing Christ so that he can be righteous in forgiving sinners.³⁷ This position is seen by Paulson as a defect in Lutheran orthodoxy. For him, law is alien to God's essence, that is, alien to who he is and hence not eternal. Thus, there is no necessity for Christ — or, for that matter, anyone else — to appease God's wrath. In coming to terms with why Christ died, placating divine wrath is taken off the table. Removed from the essence of God is the moral component of law. Atonement is no longer a struggle within God in which his love satisfies his avenging justice so that he can justify the sinner, but it is replaced by a struggle that the Christian experiences within himself. This internal struggle is passed off as the atonement. Consider what Paulson says: "Until the law is satisfied that is, until the sinner dies — there simply will be no atonement and reconciliation with God."38 Atonement now "is Christ who gives himself to his opponents in the form of a simple promise."39 The weight of God's action is switched from the atonement that Christ offered at Golgotha to the moment of faith that believes the word. This position is at odds with that of the LCMS's premier theologian Francis Pieper, who wrote that "the objective reconciliation or objective justification [is] of the whole world." 40 Unless this is preached, faith cannot be created. But the new "theology of the cross" places both the atonement and reconciliation in the moment of faith, and together they define justification.

In setting forth their doctrine of atonement, Forde and Paulson make use of Luther's "happy exchange" language, in which Christ and the believer each take the place of the other. As we share in his blessedness, he shares in our misery. But they give a different twist to Luther's "happy exchange" description of the atonement. According to them, Christ shares in our misery, but does not take our place under God's wrath. If this were the case, so it is argued, law would become superior to God. According to Forde and Paulson, this cannot be allowed, because law is not eternal and does not belong to who God is. Christ shares in our sin, not by imputation but by becoming one with us.

DIGRESSION: OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION

Not long after the LCMS was formed, it had to address the denial of objective

³⁴ My translation.

³⁵ Paulson's Lutheran Theology is listed by Logia as one of the twenty-five best books in the last twenty-five years (John T. Pless, "Twenty-Five Titles in Twenty-Fives Years," Logia 26, no. 1 [2018]: 9).

³⁶ Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 265-284. Cf. Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 169-184.

³⁷ Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51: "Atonement is not a legal transaction between the Father and the Son. Instead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (who preaches and believes the good news) work together outside the law in mercy."

³⁸ Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51.

³⁹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 5.

⁴⁰ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-1953), 2:402.

or universal justification first with the Ohio Synod and then with the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod, both forerunners of the ALC and now the ELCA. In both cases, fellowship was disrupted. Rather than seeing justification first as an act of God in forgiving the world of sin in Christ's resurrection (objective justification), it was seen as the personal experience that took place only when a person heard and believed the gospel (subjective justification). Faith was made a cause of justification. Justification was to be understood as subjectively happening in the faith of the believer and not objectively in God forgiving the world in Christ. Denial of objective justification surfaced again in 1965 at Concordia Theological Seminary and was resolved when it was rejected by the faculty in the 1980s after the seminary moved to Fort Wayne. This denial of objective justification in the LCMS did not deny the vicarious satisfaction, as is now done in the new "theology of the cross"; however, both positions placed the deciding moment in faith and not in what God accomplished in Jesus.

RAMIFICATIONS OF DENYING OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION IN THE NEW "THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS"

Paulson defines Christ's atonement as his identifying with sinners. By placing himself under the law's accusations, Christ comes to see himself as a sinner and even the original sinner.⁴¹ This identification of Christ with sinners is not substitutionary or vicarious in the sense that by placing himself under God's wrath over human misconduct, he satisfies it. This Paulson rejects as the "legal scheme" that he finds basic for the Anselmic theory of atonement, which he rejects. Of this, he says, "Theories of atonement developed as a means of making the cross of Christ fit into this legal scheme. It is true that Christ pays debts, suffers punishment and pays ransom to the old lords of this world, but not to the legal scheme rule."⁴²

In support of his rejection of Christ's death as a substitutionary satisfaction, Paulson references Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism of the creed's second article, which states that Christ has redeemed the sinner not with gold or silver but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. Rather than taking this as an opportunity to affirm the Anselmic view of the atonement, which Luther intended, Paulson holds that the believer, not God, receives Christ's atoning action. "It is faith that receives this blood (not the Father in heaven, or the law, or the devil), thus reversing and bringing to a halt all sacrifice that proceeds from sinner to God."⁴³ All that is needed is "a simple promise: I forgive you."⁴⁴ What Paulson describes as atonement is at one level a falsely formulated doctrine of justification, but it is better designated as a doctrine of sanctification. Without belief in objective justification, subjective justification simply becomes another way of speaking of sanctification because it takes place within the believer. Pieper, on the other hand, places the atoning

⁴¹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 104-105.

⁴² Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 91.

⁴³ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 93.

⁴⁴ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 5.

moment in Christ and not faith.

The reconciliation of the world was not accomplished, either in whole or in part, by the Savior's guaranty that his disciples would lead a life "united with God," but solely and entirely by the Savior's own fulfillment of the divine Law. The Savior Himself paid the entire debt, "mathematically" and "juridically" computed, and in His resurrection received God's receipt for it; and this receipt was made out to mankind. Christ, who was given into death for our sins, was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25).⁴⁵

In classical Lutheran theology, as presented by Pieper, Christ suffers not for his sin, but for the guilt of the sin of all. Paulson sees it otherwise. Christ "came to believe that his Father was not pleased with him, thus multiplying sin in himself just like any other original sinner who does not trust a promise from God."⁴⁶ So, for Paulson, Christ regarded himself as a sinner. His plea in Gethsemane to remove the cup is seen as his confession of his own sin and his cry of dereliction as a statement of unbelief.

Then finally in the words of the cross, "My God, my God . . ." he made the public confession of a sinner, "why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:35 NRS). Confessing made it so, and thus Christ committed his own, personal sin — not only an actual sin, but the original sin. He felt God's wrath and took that experience as something truer than God's own word of promise to him ("This is My son, with whom I am well pleased"). He looked upon himself on the cross and believed in his own unbelief.⁴⁷

To his own sin, Christ added the sins of the entire world. Sin is seen as unbelief in not accepting the gospel or the promise.⁴⁸ In assessing his situation of being crucified, Christ let his mind-set be determined more by the misery of his death by crucifixion and less by his self-awareness that having done God's will, he was God's Son.

This bizarre and totally unacceptable interpretation cannot go unanswered. Jesus' plea to God in the moment of his greatest desperation was the most profound expression of faith ever spoken. True faith is not seen in the hour of health and prosperity but in the moment when the believer is overwhelmed by death. Jesus' enemies got it right: "He trusts in God; let God deliver him" (Matt 27:43). This God did by raising him from the dead; and so his faith that he was God's Son was confirmed (Acts 13:33).

Paulson's view that atonement takes place in the faith of the believer resembles Osiander's view that justification is only a subjective experience. He denies objective justification and holds only to subjective justification, which is, as explained above, only sanctification. Nevertheless, Paulson distances himself first from what he calls the ontological view of Osiander, that "sinners become righteous in themselves,"

⁴⁵ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 2:365.

⁴⁶ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 105.

⁴⁷ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 105

⁴⁸ This view was proposed by Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 124, and now also by Joel P. Meyer in the *Concordia Journal*: "Our root sin is not to make bad choices according to a standard of right and wrong, good or bad. Our fundamental sin is that we do not expect good things from God" (Meyer, "Justification as the Ground and Goal of the Christian Life in Luther's Catechisms," 46).

and then from the Lutheran orthodox view that sinners "can be declared righteous, forensically as in a court of law."⁴⁹ His rejection of forensic justification raises concerns. Pieper enumerates six objections to forensic justification⁵⁰ and then adds this telling condemnation: "Those who deny the juridical character of reconciliation and of its appropriation are thus engaged, consciously or unconsciously, in the evil work of destroying the entire Christian doctrine, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture."⁵¹ By juridical, Pieper expressly means actus forensis. Paulson will have none of this.

For Paulson, justification happens in the present moment and so is properly described as existential. For him, justification "is faith in Christ in the form of a promise made by Christ, and conveyed to you by a preacher." And "Christ is present in faith, but in a hidden way, that is by means of a simple word. Christ is heard, not seen; even when the disciples had him in plain sight."⁵² Here we have to ask if Paulson is proposing that the disciples' witness to the resurrected Jesus was more a matter of hearing than seeing.⁵³

Again, we come back to the major flaw of the new "theology of the cross": that by redefinition, the atonement is denied. This follows from denying that law belongs to God's essence. Without the inner compulsion of fulfilling his own law, God simply forgives the sinner. To this, Pieper provides a more than adequate response: "Luther states that it is paganism (the faith 'of the Turks and Jews') to imagine that God is gracious to men 'without cost' — without the Vicarious Satisfaction." In the new "theology of the cross," God forgives simply because he is God, without the necessity of propitiation. What Pieper wrote more than a century ago of the Socinians (Unitarians) is prophetically applicable to the new "theology of the cross": "Men have asserted that God can forgive sins by His almighty power and therefore satisfaction to be rendered by Christ is superfluous." 55

⁴⁹ Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 124.

⁵⁰ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 2:351-355.

⁵¹ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 2:355.

⁵² Paulson, Lutheran Theology, 126. On this thought, he converges with Oswald Bayer, though one is not dependent on the other. See Trygve Wyller, Glaube und autonome Welt: Diskussion eines Grundproblems der neueren systematischen Theologie mit Blick auf Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oswald Bayer und K. E. Løgstrup (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 90–145, esp. 142.

⁵³ Paulson's right of center position in the ELCA has been reason enough to provide for him an audience in the LCMS. He has contributed to Logia, been published by the Luther Academy, and contributed to Concordia Publishing House's recently published *The Necessary Distinction*, where he sets forth his view that the law is not eternal. Cf. Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 265–284, here at 271; Steven D. Paulson, "The Simul and the Two Kingdoms," Logia 24, no. 4 (2016): 17–26.

⁵⁴ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 2:347. See also C. F. W. Walther, Law and Gospel, tr. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 196. "[God] has laid the burden of our sins upon Him and given Him up to be crucified for our sins."

⁵⁵ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics 2:351.

THE RISE OF THE NEW "THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS" AND RESPONSES TO IT

Forde began proposing his "theology of the cross" at least by 1969,⁵⁶ when the LCMS had begun to recognize the devastating effects of higher critical methods and the accompanying neoorthodoxy at its St. Louis seminary. In his locus on Christology in the Braaten-Jenson Christian Dogmatics in 1984, Forde further developed his views.⁵⁷ After his death in 2005, his essays continued to be published.⁵⁸

Scott R. Murray may have been among the first in the LCMS to see the fundamental flaws in Forde's theology in his 1998 doctoral dissertation, published in 2002 as Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in American Lutheranism. In 2009, Jack D. Kilcrease presented a polemical tour de force against Forde's denial of the atonement in his doctoral dissertation. In 2011, he took on Forde's doctrine of the law in a Concordia Theological Quarterly (CTQ) article. And he also addressed Forde's theology in a lecture at the symposia series of Concordia Theological Seminary — Fort Wayne in 2011, which was published in CTQ in 2012. Without specific reference to Forde, but with him in mind, Kilcrease evaluated historical understandings of the death of Jesus in The Self-Donation of God in 2013, arguing against Forde that for Lutherans, Christ's death was a propitiation. In 2018, he extended his critique of Forde in The Work of Christ: Revisionist Doctrine and the Confessional Lutheran Response.

Another response to a theology along Forde's lines comes from Nathan Rinne who takes issue with Nicholas Hopman's interpretation of Luther. In his article "Luther's Antinomian Disputations and *lex aeterna*," Hopman proposed that Luther did not believe the law was eternal.⁶⁵ Yet as Rinne shows, what presents itself as scholarly Luther research may not be so.

Forde presents his theology as Luther's. Hence, his chapter in the Braaten-Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* is called "Luther's 'Theology of the Cross." Paulson, Wengert, Nestingen, and Hopman present Forde's "theology of the cross" as if it were an acceptable and academically informed interpretation of Luther's theology. They have

⁵⁶ Gerhard Forde, The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969).

⁵⁷ Forde, "The Work of Christ," in Christian Dogmatics 2:5-104.

⁵⁸ Gerhard O. Forde, "Sacraments as Eschatological Gift and Promise," Lutheran Quarterly 31, no. 3 (2017): 310-319.

⁵⁹ Murray, Law, Life, and the Living God, 123-132.

⁶⁰ Jack D. Kilcrease, "The Self-Donation of God: Gerhard Forde and the Question of Atonement in the Lutheran Tradition." PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009.

⁶¹ Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law," 151-179.

⁶² Jack D. Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," Concordia Theological Quarterly 76, nos. 3-4 (2012): 269–293.

⁶³ Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013). For a thorough discussion of Christ suffering under the law in Luther's theology, see Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, 280–286.

⁶⁴ Jack D. Kilcrease, The Work of Christ: Revisionist Doctrine and the Confessional Lutheran Response (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), esp. 105–170.

⁶⁵ In this issue of CTQ, Nathan Rinne (editor's note: the librarian at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN, at the time) takes issue with Hopman's reading of Luther.

⁶⁶ Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 169-184.

been so successful that denial of the law's third use has come to be seen as a mark of loyalty to Luther. *lex semper accusat,* ripped out of context, has come to be revered as incontrovertible truth. Since God forgives without Christ offering himself as a sacrifice under the law — what Paulson calls "the legal scheme" — their theology can be summed up with "God's gift for you," a phrase that exhibits the new "theology of the cross's" confusion of justification with the atonement. For Lutherans, justification is by grace, but atonement came with a high price, which, according to Luther's Small Catechism, is Christ's blood. Put Luther to the side and let the words of the Holy Spirit speak for themselves: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18). Hear also the words of Jesus, "This my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Matt 26:28).

This new theology could be rectified by understanding the gospel as the proclamation that Christ has both actively and passively fulfilled the law, but this is something that Paulson and the others explicitly reject. Since law does not have a fixed place in God, it does not lay down the framework in which Christ accomplishes his redemptive work. For Paulson, law and gospel are not complementary, and so proclamation of Christ's fulfillment of the law is not the gospel.⁶⁷

In a book review in National Review, David French, who is not identified as a theologian, writes, "Christians are familiar with the concepts of justification and sanctification. Justification is the moment when God — through His Son's atoning sacrifice — declares man righteous in His sight. Sanctification is the lifelong process of spirit battling flesh, of the redeemed man's journey to holiness." In the new "theology of the cross," atonement, justification, and sanctification are reduced to the moment of hearing and believing.

Conclusion

In this world of sin, law comes as accusation to the old Adam within each of us, lex semper accusat, but in Eden this was not so, and in the next world it will not be so. By disregarding the command that was a call to faith, to take God at his word, Adam was responsible for turning the law as a description of God's positive relation to man into an accusation that no man but Christ alone could resolve. In Adam, "you shall" became "you shall not." By Christ's fulfilling the law's requirements and suffering its accusations and penalties in our stead, he returned our perception of the law to its original, pristine condition as a perfect revelation of who God is and how Adam saw it before he transgressed. Christ accomplished what God demanded, and so the law's

⁶⁷ Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 271. "Nor is God . . . a being who 'corresponds to Himself' in the end—which is a version of making God into nothing but the eternal Law itself."

⁶⁸ David French, "Charity in an Angry Time," National Review 69, no. 22 (2017): 46.

⁶⁹ See Luther's discussion of the law in Eden in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544- 1554), AE 1:103–110. One should not look to Luther for first, second, and third uses of the law. Yet, he does condemn as equivocation that the law has the same meaning in each case. So, he writes, "That the Law before sin is one thing and the Law after sin is something else" (109–110).

threats were transformed into gospel. The gospel is nothing else but the proclamation, that by his life and death, Christ absorbed the law into himself. It was not only a formal fulfilling of law, but he transposed the law into a brilliance far beyond what Adam knew. Now the law is christologically fulfilled and defined. So, the third use of the law is not only that believers refrain from moral wrong, but also that they do the works that Christ did. Here, Luther should speak.

Natural man would prefer that there be no law, because he is not able to perform what it demands. The sin that has been committed is the second tyrant, and it brings forth the third, namely, death and damnation. Who could be happy when he is answerable to those three? But now they have been vanquished, the Law is fulfilled by Christ and then also by us who have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He adds the courage so that we may glory even in our sufferings (Rom. 5:3), and thus the Law is no longer outrageous in its dictates but an agreeable companion. The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are.⁷⁰

If Christians now love the law, we can take this a step further: Christ does the works of the law in believers. Simul iustus et peccator describes our condition. Until we die, we live in two diametrically opposing realities: in one, we are shown our sin, and in the other, we are free from the law's accusations because we are in Christ. Denial of the third use of the law does not in each case translate into a redefinition of God as one who no longer requires the death of Jesus as atonement for sin. But it does allow it. And a denial of the eternal, unchanging nature of the moral law of God (FC SD II 50) demands it.



JUSTIFICATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF ROBERT D. PREUS

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HEN Robert D. Preus joined the ministerium of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) in 1957 and J. A. O. "Jack" Preus in 1958, a new dimension was added to the synod that would change its course. They had come to the attention of the presidents of both LCMS seminaries, which were working towards accreditation. Robert had his PhD from the University of Edinburgh under the leading British neoorthodox scholar T. F. Torrance. Jack had a PhD in classics from the University of Minnesota. Calling Robert to St. Louis in 1957 and Jack to Springfield in 1958 were academic opportunities not to be missed. In two years, Robert was challenging a new theology, known as neoorthodoxy, that was infesting the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, which eventually led to a majority of its faculty walking out in February 1974.1 Now in place were events that culminated in the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which included those who supported the St. Louis majority faculty. Arriving in Springfield in 1958, Jack became seminary president in 1962. In 1969, Jack was elected LCMS president.² After the St. Louis seminary walkout, Robert first became its academic dean, then its virtual interim president, and then president of Concordia Theological Seminary, then in Springfield, Illinois.

By the mid-twentieth century, when Robert and Jack joined the LCMS, the old liberalism in American mainline Protestantism had given way to neoorthodoxy, which, in spite, of its seductive name, was an umbrella term for a theology that held that the real word of God was a preached or spoken word and the Bible was the word of God in a secondary or derivative sense. Robert Preus referred to it as "crisis theology" in that preaching becomes the word of God in the moment of preaching. According to this theology, what the Bible says does not have to correspond to the events it reports. First to go was Jonah, then the virgin birth of Jesus, his resurrection, and his miracles, all of which can be preached without asserting that they really happened. What mattered was the proclamation of the one doctrine of the gospel as shaped by its circumstances — of good news in a bad situation. In the LCMS, this came to be called "gospel reductionism" by its critics.

Both Jack and Robert Preus were committed to Article XI of the Formula of Concord as it was understood by their great-grandfather Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), who came to minister to immigrants in the Upper Midwest and establish the Norwegian Lutheran Church (NLC), of which he was the second president. A controversy arose when some of its pastors taught that God's wrath ceased only when

¹ On these events, see The Board of Control of Concordia Seminary, Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout (St. Louis: Board of Control, 1977).

² For an overview of J. A. O. Preus's professional life, see Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "J. A. O. Preus: Theologian, Churchman, or Both?" Concordia Theological Quarterly 74 (January-April 2010): 57-72.

a person believes, which for H. A. Preus was a denial of the universal atonement and objective justification, and was seen as a denial of Article XI of the Formula of Concord, which confesses that God elects sinners to salvation. Faith receives salvation but is not a cause of it. In the predestination controversy with the Ohio Synod, C. F. W. Walther and Francis Pieper rejected the teaching that God chose believers to salvation "in view of [their] faith," that is, that God predestined those who he knew would believe; he knew the outcome of the game before it started and placed his bets on the winner. In the 1912 Madison Agreement, the synods that would form the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (NELCA) in 1917 (later simply the ELC before its merger into the ELCA) allowed both views — that God chose the elect without condition (the position of FC XI, which was later called in the NELCA the "first form") and the opposing view, that God elected those who he knew would believe, *intuitu fidei* (which was called the "second form").⁵

Jack and Robert Preus were confirmed in an LCMS Chicago-area congregation and attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, founded by their great-grandfather Herman Amberg Preus, and then Luther Seminary, where their uncle, another Herman Amberg Preus (1896–1995), taught. This Herman Amberg Preus represented the "first form," and his faculty colleague and soon opponent George Aus advocated for the "second form." Seminary students took sides and disrupted chapel services with foot stamping.⁶ Robert, then a student in his final seminary year, requested the synod council to censure Aus's position. It responded that Aus's position was acceptable, so with only months to ordination at age twenty-three, Robert left Luther Seminary for Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota, for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).⁷ His brother Jack, already a pastor, soon followed. Aus pointed out that the NELCA never accepted the Formula of Concord, in which the doctrine of election is found.⁸ In "My Confession," addressed to the synod council, Robert gave

³ The Latin phrase intuitu fidei means "in view of faith." It indicates that God elects those people to salvation who he knows will believe, and so predestination becomes an effect of his omniscience.

⁴ Known since 1946 as the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC).

⁵ Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Bodies in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 12.

⁶ See Roy A. Harrisville, "Contested Election Memoir," Lutheran Quarterly 34, no. 3 (2020): 346–349. Harrisville mistakenly says that Jack left first. Of the situation at Luther Seminary, David Preus writes, "Some [Luther] seminary students delighted in stirring up classroom controversy between Professor [H. A.] Preus and Professor George Aus, who equally defended the second predestination for [God] elected those who he knew would believe." David W. Preus, Two Trajectories: J. A. O. Preus and David Preus (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 15.

A brief summary of the controversy is provided by Mark Granquist, A History of Luther Seminary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 109–110. Robert's letter of departure, "My Confession," was published in Klemet I. Preus, ed., Doctrine Is Life: The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 193–194.

⁸ Robert D. Preus, "Dr. Herman A. Preus: In Memoriam," *Logia* 4, no. 4 (October 1995): 55. Robert Preus called Aus's view on predestination a heresy (R. D. Preus, "My Confession," 194). On April 8, 1948, a committee appointed by NELCA president J. A. Aasgaard to resolve differences between Herman Preus and George Aus concluded that there was no essential difference on the doctrine of election between their positions (Granquist, A History of Luther Seminary, 125 n. 15). While Granquist notes that Robert and Jack left the NELCA, he makes no mention of the effect this would have for Lutheranism in America. H. A. Preus continued to teach at Luther Seminary until

reason for leaving:

I have been taught that unregenerate man under the influence of the Holy Spirit has a free will either to accept or reject Christ. I have been told in class that faith is not a gift or work of the Holy Spirit in me, and the whole class has been challenged to find a single passage which teaches otherwise. . . It also has been stubbornly maintained that unregenerate man is not spiritually dead, dead in sins, but is only asleep. . . It has also been publicly stated to the whole senior class that this teaching — that man is responsible for the acceptance or rejection of grace — is the official position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church [ELC].9

For Robert Preus, this was heresy and opposing it would define how he understood justification. Fifty years later, in a eulogy for his uncle, the second Herman Amberg Preus, Robert called Aus a "subtle synergist" who "taught emphatically that conversion is not exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. . . [Aus] did not hesitate to say in class that 'man converts himself." Preus notes that the 1969 LCMS declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) did not resolve this issue. 11

For Robert Preus, making justification dependent on faith was similar to what was called the "second form," that predestination was dependent on faith, that is, that God elected to salvation those he knew would believe. This would be at odds with the LCMS's historic position on justification. ¹² Justification for Robert Preus was always propter Christum per fidem ("because of Christ, through faith") never propter fidem nor even post fidem ("after faith"). For Preus, "Christ's righteousness, the justitia aliena ["alien righteousness"] . . . [is] extra nos ["outside of us"] in every sense." ¹³

Robert Preus saw seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodox theology almost as his own. In "the period of orthodoxy . . . (ca. 1580–1715) no other doctrine was given such thorough treatment as the locus on justification," to which he adds that faith has no value in itself but "justifies only by virtue of its object." Robert was not a repristination theologian and at times could be critical of Luther and the Lutheran Orthodox theologians. For example, Johann Wilhelm Baier — with good intentions but

¹⁹⁶⁷ and Aus until 1973 (Granquist, A History of Luther Seminary, 110).

⁹ R. D. Preus, "My Confession," 193-194.

¹⁰ R. D. Preus, "Dr. Herman A. Preus," 55.

¹¹ Robert D. Preus, "Fellowship Reconsidered: An Assessment between the LCMS and the ALC in the Light of Past, Present and Future," in *Preus on Justification*, 311–335.

¹² Robert D. Preus, "Objective Justification," in *Preus on Justification*, 147–153. In more recent times, a variant of the second form of predestination is offered by James Nestingen, who holds that faith completes the atonement and so becomes a determinative factor for salvation. "He [Christ] enters the conscience through the absolution, through the proclaimed Word and administered Sacrament to effect the forgiveness of sins. This is the true substitutionary atonement, happening here and now." James Arne Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," in *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel*, ed. Albert B. Collver III, James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 174.

¹³ Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," in Preus on Justification, 98.

¹⁴ Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy," in Preus on Justification, 79, 93.

disastrous results — spoke of faith as a cause of salvation. Preus wrote, "It is difficult to understand how one can make faith a condition of justification (in the causal sense), without teaching justification is *propterfidem* or at least *postfidem*. God does not reward the believer because of his faith or after he comes to faith. *Propter* belongs with *Christum*, on account of Christ," and not *fidem*, on account of faith. Emphasizing that faith can never be a cause of salvation, *propter fidem*, it also cannot be *post fidem*, as if believers are rewarded with salvation.

If it were not for a tribute by the late Kurt Marquart to Preus entitled "The 'Realist Principle' of Theology,"¹⁷ this aspect of Preus's theology may have continued unnoticed. "Realist Principle" means that the theological and historical words of the Bible correspond to objective truth. Its alternative is an idealism that holds that truth consists in ideas and not in things, a kind of Platonism that reappeared in the philosophies of Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel.¹⁸ To Preus' list might be added the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Austin in which truth rests in language not in things or persons, a view incorporated into the theology of promise.

Marquart came across the "realist principle" in an essay by Preus, delivered in 1973 shortly before a majority of the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, were removed from their positions in February 1974. Of the six theses, the fourth is "Luther's Realist Principle" that "Our justification before God is a real verdict, not a myth (Apol. IV). The virgin birth, the suffering and death, the miracles, the resurrection of Christ are historical, having real references in fact." Preus distinguishes doctrines or theology from historical facts, but historical facts such as the events in Christ's life are just as true as abstract doctrines such as election, sacraments, and justification. ²¹

Already in 1962 before the tumultuous events at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1974, Preus had written that there are no "cases in which statements of Scripture do not seem to correspond to the apparent data in the external world (astronomy, geography, topography, etc.)."²² What the Bible reports corresponds to actual historical events, things that really happened. Preus had in mind his St. Louis seminary colleagues who interpreted the historical elements of the gospels as myths, as did Rudolf Bultmann, or held to the neoorthodoxy of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, which ignored the gospel's

¹⁵ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 114.

¹⁶ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 116.

¹⁷ Kurt Marquart, "The 'Realist Principle' of Theology," in Preus on Justification, 367-373.

¹⁸ In his 1973 Bethany Lectures, Preus identifies Strauss, Troeltsch, Ritschl, Harnack, Classical Liberalism, and Idealism as departures from historical Christianity. To these he adds Kierkegaard, Tillich, Bultmann, Käsemann, the post-Bultmannians, E. Brunner, and K. Barth. Robert D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" in *Doctrine Is Life: The Essays of Robert Preus on Scripture* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 179–214, here at 213.

¹⁹ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 200-202.

²⁰ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 201.

²¹ Marquart based his chapter "The 'Realist Principle' of Theology" (*Preus on Justification, 367*) on Robert Preus's "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret" (above, n. 18).

²² Robert D. Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy," in *Preus on Scripture*, 79–97, here at

historical elements. For them, the Bible is not the word of God but becomes the word of God, 23 a view which he opposed in the theology of Gerhard Forde, then a new professor at Luther Seminary.²⁴ Robert's son Klemet explains, "His 'realist principle," which he attributed to Luther, "is nothing more than the fact that theological assertions correspond to reality outside of themselves."25 "[For] when a biblical section in its intended sense has a referent, it is a real referent, whether the referent is a historical occurrence (Christ's resurrection), a state of being (the personal union), an act of God in history (personal justification through faith in Christ) or whatever."26 Biblical words correspond to events that really happened, like the resurrection, and to what really exists, like the Trinity. Reality does not consist in the words but in what the words report. Preus called this "exegetical realism," that the "God who has caused all Scripture to be recorded is indeed a living God who invades history, authors it, and reveals himself historically."²⁷ Preus expands on his view that history is the locale of revelation in a response to Thestrup Pedersen, who said that "Luther engages in Christological exegesis . . . not with the eyes of a historian but with the eyes of a theologian."28 In this view, what the Bible said about Christ could be theologically true but not historically true. For Pedersen, history had an objectivity that theology did not have. To this, Preus responds that the article on original sin in the Formula of Concord is "nothing more than a commentary on the history of Genesis 3." History was as important for Luther as it was to Preus, that he could say that biblical "history gives rise to doctrine" and adds that "Luther would not distinguish between the eyes of a historian and the eyes of a theologian — as though they could come to different conclusions."30 Preus sums up his argument, "The doctrines revealed in Scripture and the acts of God recounted there have a real basis, a real referent, or there would be no theology at all to Luther. This is a hermeneutical principle to Luther."31 Doctrines are drawn out of historical events.

²³ Robert D. Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," in Preus on Scripture, 39–52, here at 50. This was the first of three essays appearing in Concordia Theological Monthly in February, March, and April 1960, all of which are included in Preus on Scripture.

²⁴ On Forde, see below, p. 51. A thorough presentation of this view that the Scriptures are inspiring and not inspired was set forth in some detail by Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999). For example, "The reliability of Scripture is to be found in the reality to which it points, rather than the form in which it is given" (142). The authority of the Bible is seen in what it does and not what it is. Compare Oswald Bayer: "[Scripture's] authority consists in that it works faith. The Lutheran tradition has articulated this in such a way that its auctoritas normativa follows from its auctoritas causativa—because of the authority it has to create faith." Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, tr. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 77. The chapter in which this appears is entitled "What Makes the Bible Become Holy Scripture" (68–92, italics original).

²⁵ K. I. Preus, "Introduction," in Preus on Justification, 22.

²⁶ Quoted in Klemet I. Preus, "Introduction," 23. Klemet elaborated on his father's "Realist Principle of Theology" in a section of his introduction called "Correspondence" in Preus on Justification, 21–28.

²⁷ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 201.

²⁸ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 200.

²⁹ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 201.

³⁰ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 201.

³¹ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 200.

Klemet Preus comments on his father's position, "Justification had to be a real verdict based on a real atonement that occurred through real historical events or the Christian could have no certainty of the grace of God."³² The dogmatic bias of the apostles does not compromise the historical authenticity of their witness. Tellingly, he adds that anyone who experienced the resurrection would have a bias.³³

Having attended Luther College and then Luther Seminary, Robert and Jack knew many of the theologians in the ALC in which the ELC was its majority component.34 Succeeding Kent Knutson as ALC president was David Preus, who never understood why cousins Jack and Robert could be so upset with two Latin words, intuitu fidei.35 In 1968, the year before the same convention in which the LCMS would first elect Jack president and declare fellowship with the ALC, Robert delivered an essay entitled "To Join or Not to Join." Here he noted that biblical inerrancy was being denied at his alma mater Luther College, and this was not "cut off from the main stream of theological development in the [American Lutheran] Church."36 He continues, "At Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, the largest seminary of the American Lutheran Church and the second largest seminary in our country, the same denial of the truthfulness and infallibility of Scripture is explicit and denied."37 He references Warren Quanbeck, an advisor to the ALC president, who said that "the doctrine that 'The Holy Spirit was the real author of Scripture' and that therefore 'every proposition in it was guaranteed infallible and inerrant' has been crushed by the blows struck by studies in historical and scientific matters." Then Preus zeroes in on Gerhard Forde, who he says is even more explicit in his rejection of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Forde says the Bible is inspired only by reason of its content; and so our preaching would be inspired for the same reason.³⁹ In this view, biblical authority rests in its proximity to

³² K. I. Preus, "Introduction," 25.

³³ Robert D. Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," 131–178, here at 159: "Of course [the apostles] have a dogmatic bias. Who would not had seen the risen Christ? Of course they were believing Christians and not merely objective historians. But faith and history do not oppose each other. How can one report a historical event if he does not believe it? And profound interpretation does not vitiate or cast doubt upon the reality and historicity of the event interpreted. A religious aim may well influence the presentation of fact, but this does not change the facts themselves. There is nothing wrong with the facts being explained by one who has experienced them and been affected by them."

³⁴ Preus gives a historical overview of how Lutheran synods would eventually merge into the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in "To Join or Not to Join," in *Preus on Justification*, 275–310. This was followed by another essay, "Fellowship Reconsidered," 311–335.

³⁵ See David W. Preus, Pastor and President: Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011). On the relationship and theological emphases of David and J. A. O. Preus, see D. W. Preus, Two Trajectories. For more background on the intuitu fidei controversy, see David P. Scaer, Surviving the Storms: Memoirs of David P. Scaer (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Luther Academy, 2018), 251–258.

³⁶ R. D. Preus, "To Join or Not to Join," 298-299.

³⁷ R. D. Preus, "To Join or Not to Join," 299-301.

³⁸ R. D. Preus, "To Join or Not to Join," 299–301. Fredrik A. Schiotz, president of the American Lutheran Church, had outlined his church body's stance with respect to the Scriptures in his *The Church's Confessional Stand Relative to the Scriptures: An Address* (Minneapolis: Office of Public Relations of The American Lutheran Church, 1966).

³⁹ R. D. Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," 172.

the events it reports and not in its inspired character,⁴⁰ a view proposed long before by Schleiermacher.⁴¹

Forde's denial of the Bible as the inspired word of God was bad enough for Preus, but Preus also took Forde to task for being downright wrong in saying the divine origin of the Scriptures was an unproven presupposition for the earliest church fathers and for Lutheran Orthodox theologians when they did theology. For his position, Preus says, Forde "does not have a shred of evidence." He elaborates that Forde is "another young ALC theologian" who made an unfounded charge that any "orthodox Lutheran theologian ever treated Scriptures in such a cavalier fashion" as to assume the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible without proof.⁴² Preus is emphatic: "Christians did not invent the theory of inspiration to support Christianity, as Forde implies. Rather all have arrived at the doctrine of inspiration in the same way as they arrive at every other article of faith, by drawing it from Scripture itself."⁴³

Forde's claim that biblical inspiration was an unproven assumption was historically false and parallels his theory that the Bible's inspiration consisted in its ability to create faith. Preus's dog in the fight was his published PhD dissertation *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians.* Forde's functional view that the Bible is inspired insofar as it inspires faith had already been proposed by neoorthodox theologians as an alternative to the classical view that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Preus saw a connection between the denial of verbal inspiration and the synergistic view of faith that he encountered in his student days at Luther Seminary.

One cannot fail to see the parallel between this synergistic theory of the origin of the Bible and the synergistic doctrine of conversion that prevailed at [Luther] Seminary. As faith has its origin in the cooperation of the human will with the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, so the Scriptures are the result of a collaboration of the will of the human authors and the Spirit of God. One who believes that faith and justification are entirely a gift of God's grace easily perceives the fundamental error underlying the historical-critical method.⁴⁵

In his essay "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," Preus lists five ways in which the doctrine of justification is threatened, of which, "The second assault against the article of justification by faith is to separate God's act of justifying

⁴⁰ R. D. Preus, "To Join or Not to Join," 301.

⁴¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. and tr. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, 2 vols. (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 1:594–596.

⁴² R. D. Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," 155–179, here at 171. Like others, Forde came under the spell of Karl Barth's neoorthodoxy (172–173), but the view that the efficacy of the Bible is derived from the proximity of the writers to Jesus had already been proposed by Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, 1:591–594.

⁴³ R. D. Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," 174.

⁴⁴ Robert D. Preus, The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians (Edinburgh, UK: Oliver and Boyd, 1955).

⁴⁵ R. D. Preus, "Dr. Herman A. Preus," 55 (as above, n. 8).

the sinner through faith from its basis in Christ's atonement."46 In a previous essay, "The Unity of Scripture," Preus wrote that "without reference to [Christ's] work of atonement . . . the very term Christocentricity of the Scriptures is a piece of deceptive theological blather."47 "The danger and the tragedy of making faith a condition for justification is that one begins to look for assurance of salvation and grace, not in the objective atonement and righteousness of Christ, but in the quality or strength of one's faith, as if justifying faith is something other than pure trust and receptivity."48 "There can be no imputation of Christ's righteousness with which I can stand before God, if Christ did not by His atonement acquire such righteousness."49 In his last book, Justification and Rome, he points out that the nominalists and Socinians (forerunners of the Unitarians) "taught an 'absolute grace,' a free and absolute imputation which did not require the intervention of Christ to atone for the sins of the world."50 He cites Luther, that the forgiveness of sins merely by imputation without atonement is a "miserable and shocking opinion and error," that if this were true, "the entire New Testament would be nothing and useless."51 The view that justification was based on "a forensic act . . . dependent on His will rather than the atonement and righteousness of Christ" had been proposed by Peter Abelard, who denied the vicarious atonement.⁵² For Preus, "The propter Christum is exclusive in that it is the only basis for God's verdict of justification."53 For Preus, the atonement was the foundation for justification, just as it was for Francis Pieper: "We do not believe in Christ to our justification and salvation unless we believe in Him as the One who was crucified for the expiation of our sins (1 Corinthians 2:2) . . . and in our stead fulfilled the Law (Galatians 4:4-5), shed his precious blood (1 Peter 1:18), gave His life into death (Matthew 10:28; Romans 5:10)." Preus saw the atonement as Christ placing himself under the law.⁵⁴

"The fifth assault against the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith is to make faith a condition for justification." Freus explains, "This tendency to make justification dependent upon faith has a long and sorry history in the Lutheran church, which in its Confessions hints at no such thing." Here Preus probably had in mind George Aus or anyone else who made justification dependent on faith. Justification

⁴⁶ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 100.

⁴⁷ Robert D. Preus, "The Unity of Scripture," in Preus on Scripture, 251.

⁴⁸ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 116.

⁴⁹ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 100-101.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Preus, Justification and Rome (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 74.

⁵¹ R. D. Preus, Justification and Rome, 132 n. 79.

⁵² R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 101. This has been put forth by Forde and his students Steven Paulson and James Nestingen (see above, n. 12), that justification is imputed through preaching without substitutionary atonement.

⁵³ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 106 (italics original).

⁵⁴ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 2:426. See also Robert D. Preus, "The Vicarious Atonement in John Quenstedt," in Preus on Justification, 57–58. "On the part of God there are two purposes for the vicarious atonement. First, His divine justice must be satisfied, for God is not willing to remit sins without satisfaction being made" (73).

⁵⁵ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 113.

⁵⁶ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 114.

for Preus, as it is for Pieper, is always propter Christum per fidem, that is, we are justified, forgiven, found acceptable to God on account of Christ through faith and never propter fidem, "on account of faith." When faith is inserted into the proclamation, human beings take the place of God as the ultimate cause of their salvation.

Crassly, of course, historic Roman and Arminian theology made faith a work and virtue of man a condition for fellowship with God and for salvation. But in a more subtle form the tendency to condition justification on faith is found in every form of synergism and pietism and religious emotionalism in ideologies which stress inwardness and subjectivity, in Christian Existentialism and Crisis Theology (Emil Brunner), all protestations of adherence to the *sola gratia* notwithstanding. We find the tendency where there is a preoccupation with faith as such or an inordinate interest in the phenomenology of faith rather than in the object of faith, Christ and His atoning work, and in the Gospel. For my faith is not the Gospel or the content of the Gospel, but rather embraces and applies the Gospel. Faith is never directed toward itself.⁵⁷

To accentuate the point, justification for Preus is *extra et ante fidem*, and its reality does not reside in what he calls "any 'communication." ⁵⁸ For Robert Preus, the Christian life was more than justification, *simul iustus et peccator*, as if only the final moment in a believer's life was important. In referencing Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand's commentary on James, Preus says, "He who says he believes in Christ who died is a liar, if by the power of Christ's death he does not daily die to sin; and he who claims to believe in the risen Christ deceives himself, if he does not by the power of the risen Christ advance daily in newness of life." ⁵⁹

Lutherans are widely agreed that justification is the chief article, but they are not agreed on its definition, a problem that surfaced at the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki in 1963 where, Preus notes, it was seen in monolithic terms and since then it has been seen as the only article necessary for church fellowship. Preus follows Lutheran Orthodoxy in affirming that justification is articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae ("article on which the church stands and falls"), a phrase still not located in Luther but which typifies his theology. He refers to Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I: "What is beyond dispute is that 'The first and chief article [Hauptartikel] is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25)." Preus notes, "Indeed, [the Lutheran dogmaticians] never 'considered the doctrine of justification by faith' a fundamental article of the faith." For them, justification "means the centrality of the Gospel, the centrality of Christ crucified in the theology and the proclamation of the church." Justification describes the effect, what preaching accomplishes,

⁵⁷ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 114.

⁵⁸ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 113.

⁵⁹ R. D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification," 95.

⁶⁰ R. D. Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 195.

⁶¹ R. D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification," 83.

and not its content. 62 As for its content and basis:

According to this classic Christian model, God is real, creator and sustainer of all that exists . . . the Son of God really became incarnate; He really suffered and died and rose again; the atonement is real; heaven is real; hell is real; forgiveness and justification are real, not just metaphors for something else. Unless all this is included in our theological *Vorbild*, there is nothing left of our Christianity and our Gospel, except words, empty words, impotent words, words without referents and without meaning, like tinsel on a discarded Christmas tree, or bridgework on a corpse.⁶³

For Preus, justification is central, but it is not the only doctrine.⁶⁴

For Preus, the doctrine of justification "presents God's revealed answer to all major problems of sinful man," and then he proceeds to list them: "Does God exist? What is He like? Does He love me? What must I do to be saved? Can sinful man ever stand before a holy and righteous God?"⁶⁵ Oswald Bayer also sees justification as fundamental in the sense that each person is working to justify himself: "We cannot reject the question that others put to us. Why have you done this?"⁶⁶

Whereas Preus sees justification as how God accepts the individual, Bayer here sees it as the way others accept him. Yet Bayer's definition can be of value in assessing Preus's life. Was what Preus did worth it in the eyes of others? Those seminary regents and those who conspired and succeeded in depriving him of his ministry said it wasn't. "One of his friends urged him to bear the cross quietly and accept the decision of the Board of Regents without demur."

For his refusal to take this option, we need look no further than the title of the two-volume collection of his essays, *Doctrine Is Life*. What he believed and confessed is what he lived. His life and work are pictured in the words of Jesus: "So everyone who confesses me before men, I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 10:32–33). Without confessing the truth, we put ourselves in danger of hearing the words no one wants to hear: "I never knew you" (Matt 7:23). The student who

⁶² Robert D. Preus, "Luther and the Doctrine of Justification," in *Preus on Justification*, 127. "The doctrine of justification is a fundamental principle for the Christian in applying and integrating Law and Gospel and the entire Christian doctrine."

⁶³ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 113.

⁶⁴ Justification can become so central that it soon becomes the only doctrine or at least the only doctrine that matters. Consider what Suzanne Hequet says about a meeting in 2002 between ELCA Lutherans and Catholics held in the aftermath of the 1999 Joint Declaration of Justification. "[Steven] Paulson asserted that if both parties were truly in agreement on justification, then 'Let's do church now,' meaning that Paulson, as an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was willing to give and receive communion with the Cardinal [Avery Dulles] then and there. . . . For Paulson, however, justification as articulated in the Augsburg Confession was the sole criterion" for church unity. Hequet, The 1541 Colloquy at Regensburg: In Pursuit of Church Unity (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), 76.

⁶⁵ R. D. Preus, "Perennial Problems," 97.

⁶⁶ Oswald Bayer, Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1.

⁶⁷ K. I. Preus, "Introduction," 27.

at age twenty-three did not back down before the synod and seminary leaders who found nothing wrong with the synergism of George Aus was the same man who at age fifty stood virtually alone at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in insisting that biblical history was the foundation of the gospel. In 1989, now old beyond his years, he was charged with false doctrine for defending the phrase that "all theology is Christology." Of course he had to defend it. Justification was only an extension of the atonement. This was what he once called "the realist principle in theology." For Preus, theology had to do with life and life had to do with belief and belief had to do with Christ. For Preus, theology was an academic discipline involving the mind, but it also involved the soul.

Oswald Bayer saw the value of one's life in this way: "We cannot reject the question that others put to us. Why have you done this?" And the answer is Robert Preus did it not only for himself or even his ministry, but for the sake of this seminary.

Soon after Preus was removed from the seminary presidency, his erstwhile friend turned accuser learned that Preus's replacement as interim president disallowed him from responding to an LCMS administrator who was advocating for the ordination of women. Caught in a sorry dilemma, that professor retired. The LCMS president involved in Preus's removal did not continue in office at the 1992 synod convention. If in the face of his accusers he had walked away, our seminary would not be what it is today, and, in his own eyes, he would have denied the ministry which he believed God had given him. In response to the colleague who urged him not to contest his removal from the seminary, Preus responded, "There is nothing abstract or unreal about the ministry or the minister or the function [of the ministry]."69 His great-grandfather Herman Amberg Preus understood the ministry in the same way. After Preus was formally vindicated, he was returned to the seminary as its president and reinstated in the LCMS ministerium from which he had been removed by the praesidium, but in a year and a half he was dead. For Robert, justification, atonement, the history of Jesus, and the ministry were all real, as was this seminary which will owe him a debt as long as it stands.

In a memorial tribute to his uncle, Robert noted the connection between the synergist doctrine of justification he confronted as a student at Luther Seminary and the synergism inherent in the historical-critical study of the Scriptures, which no longer were regarded as the inspired word of God. When historical criticism was introduced at Luther Seminary, Preus writes,

The older professors who had closed their eyes to the dangers of synergism in the doctrine of conversion had little trouble closing their eyes to this new intrusion. Once the historical-critical method controlled the theological curriculum at the seminary, the doctrine of the authority, verbal inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture,

⁶⁸ Bayer, Living by Faith, 1.

⁶⁹ Preus also saw as a denial of the realist principle of theology the LCMS's "Wichita Recension" of AC XIV, adopted in 1989, that allowed licensed laymen to preach and administer sacraments (K. I. Preus, "Introduction," 31). He also saw his call to the presidency of Concordia Theological Seminary as belonging to the realist principle of theology and so fought to regain it (27).

held so firmly just a few years before when I was at the seminary, was abandoned. When a number of concerned district presidents on the Church Council complained to the faculty about what was happening, they were told by a large number of younger professors that they would leave the school before they would affirm the impossible doctrine of biblical inerrancy.⁷⁰

The Church Council backed down. And his uncle Herman Preus stood virtually alone.

After Robert was removed from the LCMS ministerium, he organized the Luther Academy, which would go on to publish the *Lutheran Confessional Dogmatics and Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology.* Life is filled with as many tragedies as ironies. The Reformation 2006 issue of *Logia* printed James Nestingen's tribute to Gerhard Forde along with the "Funeral Sermon for Gerhard O. Forde" preached by Steven O. Paulson.⁷¹ Paulson entitles his introduction to *The Essential Forde*, a collection of his writings, "Forde Lives."⁷² In 2005, Forde died and has a still-growing group of disciples preserving his essays to advance his "theology of the cross" and adding their own. Yes, Forde lives. Klemet Preus published two volumes of his father's collected writings and more may be coming. The time is already here to put the writings of Preus side by side with those of Forde and his disciples and to listen to the words of Joshua, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (24:15), or better, those of Jesus, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt 6:24).

⁷⁰ R. D. Preus, "Dr. Herman A. Preus," 55 (as in n. 8).

⁷¹ A decade previously, the Holy Trinity 1996 issue of Logia had published memorials of Robert Preus.

⁷² Stephen D. Paulson, "Forde Lives," in The Essential Forde: Distinguishing Law and Gospel, ed. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Stephen D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 18.



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE TWO KINGDOMS

April 2024

The Sermon on the Mount and Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

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PERMEATING Luther's theology is his concept of the law and the gospel. This principle has proven itself convenience. . principle has proven itself convenient for preaching so that in typical Lutheran sermons expositions of the biblical texts conform to the law and gospel paradigm, even if there is good reason to conclude it is not there. Its presence is assumed without serious engagement with the text and so the text is adjusted to fit the paradigm. In listening to sermons this last summer this has become all the more obvious. Similarly in resolving any theological dispute, law and gospel is given precedence and within our own time this has proven fateful in that some Lutherans have found that ordaining women and homosexuals is not contrary to the law and gospel paradigm. This was the case with the gospel reductionism of the Saint Louis faculty in the 1960s and 1970s in which the law and gospel paradigm made the historical reliability of the biblical texts in reporting the biblical events a secondary concern.1 This was presented as a controversy over biblical inerrancy, but in a Lutheran context it was transforming the Law Gospel paradigm from a homiletical principle to a principle of biblical interpretation. This matter was thought by some to be laid to rest nearly two generations ago, but has been resurrected from its grave and flourishing. What should have been more completely vetted then and was not haunts us now. In some churches insistence on any dogma including the Trinity is seen a legalism from which the gospel has freed us. Law and gospel was also a factor in Luther's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther wrote an entire book on the Law and Gospel with these words in the title. For as many pages that the book has, the principle can be boiled down to what the law demands the gospel gives. So difficult are the law's requirements that they cannot possibly be fulfilled and a solution is provided in the gospel in that Christ does what we are unable to do. Gospel is the proclamation of what Christ has done in fulfilling the law and then suffering its penalties we deserved. Christ stands in our place under the wrath of God. In theological shorthand this is called the Anselmic or Latin view of the atonement, a doctrine that has been disputed even by Lutheran scholars as inadequately representing Luther and without biblical support. Sometimes called the penal theory of the atonement, this phrase is best avoided since it gives the false impression of a tit for tat God who is full of vengeance. Those who define the atonement so that it is no real atonement remain committed to the law and gospel as the overarching principle of theology and find a place, often a leading one, within the Lutheran fold.

With good reason the supremacy of the law gospel paradigm in the Saint

¹ David P. Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod." Springfielder 36 (December 1972), 156-71. Daivid P. Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod Continued." Springfielder 40 (September 1976), 107-18.

Louis theology came to be called gospel reductionism, a term that has fallen out of common theological parlance but is still adequate in describing any theological or hermeneutical program in which the law gospel paradigm is the controlling principle. At the heart of such a proposal is that the law is one large overwhelming negative, a virtually indestructible Manichean evil - a position that finds support in the Apology's lex semper accusat. Gospel not only overcomes the law, but annihilates it. The first casualty is denying the third use of the law or redefining it so that it is hardly different from the second use. Carthage must be destroyed as is the battle cry of the Romans. Among Lutherans the cry is the law must be destroyed. By itself and detached from the insistence that Christ's death and resurrection were for sins, the law and gospel paradigm evolves from a theological principle into a philosophical one with psychological effects with the focus on how one becomes right with God rather than how God becomes right with us; a view that requires an atonement, the Law and Gospel principle becomes anthropologically focused with attention directed on the individual who desires justification rather than on God who does the justifying. With the emphasis on the outcome of the justifying action, justification is effective in relieving those who are distressed over their condition as human beings. Thus, in the theologies of Bultmann and Tillich, God can be left out of the equation and soon is. Theology has to do with how I come to a more authentic understanding of who I am without the resurrection establishing the necessary historical foundation for God's act of justification. Law and Gospel leading to justification becomes an internal process in how one copes with being human. In this view of justification God plays a role in resolving the human dilemma but, for some, his participation is not necessary. Caught in the quandary of a life without meaning, the individual finds relief in the gospel. Understood in this way, gospel satisfies a psychological need for wholeness and does not necessarily depend on what God did in Jesus of Nazareth. Where it does, for example with conservative minded preachers, the historical fact of Jesus is assigned a functional role in resolving the sinner's dilemma. Gospel proclamation becomes a selfcontained autonomous principle on which the theological task is based, as it seems the case with now wildly popular Oswald Bayer.²

In the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth," 'Nazareth' is the important link between God and man because it nails God's action down, not to universal history, but to the history of the particular man Jesus who resided in particular place. The one confessed by the centurion as the Son of God is identified by the placard on the instrument of his crucifixion 'Jesus of Nazareth,' who was executed for insurrection by His claim that He was the king of the Jews. Without this historical foundation, justification effected by Law and Gospel becomes in the best circumstances a homiletical principle and in the worst circumstances an anthropological principle rather than a theological one because it tells us more about ourselves than about God. Though it might seem farfetched at first, the denial of objective justification, a view that has died a thousand deaths at

² Oswald Bayer, "Justification," Lutheran Quarterly 24 (2010): 337. "The preaching of justification of the sinner is the ground and center of the church."

the hands of the Missouri Synod theologians, but still survives as anthropologically focused because they preach a justification that is effective because of the believer's faith and not because of God's action.

Luther's Law Gospel paradigm, that creates faith, is necessarily dependent on the prior reality of what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth. This sequence of law and gospel following God's action in Jesus provides the undergirding not only for Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms but also for his views on the two kinds of righteousness — an item that in recent times has been presented in more detail.³ The God who acts through the history of Israel and in Jesus of Nazareth for the world's salvation also works in the world and its affairs. These works belong to the kingdom of the left hand. What He does by the proclamation of the gospel is assigned to the kingdom of the right hand. God works in the kingdom of the left hand for the benefit of the kingdom of right hand. What Luther calls the kingdom of the right hand corresponds to what Matthew called the kingdom of the heavens and the other evangelists call the kingdom of God and this kingdom comes with the preaching of the gospel that creates faith. Jesus said "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15).

Though God controls both kingdoms, His real intentions are revealed in the kingdom of the right hand by the gospel. In the kingdom of the left hand, he is the deus absconditus, because his intentions are hidden, hardly a new thought with Luther, since this is what the entire Book of Job is all about. Man does not know and will never know what God has been doing since the foundation of the world (Job 38:1-41). Luther's two kingdom doctrine has a psychological benefit for the believer. In the kingdom of the left hand, man remains ignorant of God's intentions and in the kingdom of the right hand he learns that he cannot possibly fulfill law and that God has provided a solution in the gospel. While the fulfillment of the law is not possible in the kingdom of the right hand, it is not only allowed but required in the kingdom of the left hand where he can become fully engaged in the affairs of this world. In the kingdom of right the believers in attempting to fulfill the law find themselves in a state of continual frustration and in the end condemned. Impossibility of fulfilling the law in the kingdom of the right hand turns not only into possibility but into reality in the kingdom of the left hand. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms affects the human psyche: the God who in right hand says we can do nothing to earn our salvation gives us full reign in the kingdom of the left hand. Here God works through believers and unbelievers alike to carry out his will without either knowing God's final intentions. At times, perhaps most times, what God does in the kingdom of left hand seems to be diametrically opposed to what he promises and does in the kingdom of the right hand. It is almost as if there are two different gods, one for the right hand and another for left hand. Christian's true life is found in the kingdom of right hand. What he cannot do and could never do in fulfilling the law Christ does for him and by faith he shares

in this work. In the believer's desperation to fulfill the law to satisfy God's wrath, the gospel comes with Christ's benefits which hearers receive by faith. In the kingdom of the right hand the believer is completely dependent on God to the extent that his life is absorbed into Christ's life. That believer lives a completely other kind of life in the kingdom of the left hand where he is given a full range of opportunities not only to advance himself but also to work for the good of others and benefit of society. Moving from the kingdom of the right hand where the law is all doom and gloom to the kingdom of the left hand is a life changing experience. Law that makes impossible demands and then condemns us for what we could never do becomes doable in the left hand. What was out of reach comes within reach. Law that condemns in the kingdom of the right hand now in the left hand beckons him to live up to its requirements not with the expectation of perfection but of doing a fairly decent job in fulfilling it. In the kingdom of the left hand the boundary between believers and non-believers recedes and, in regard to the external law, both are on equal footing. Both are expected to follow the law and do what the it requires and according to their behaviors both receive rewards and penalties appropriate to their actions. At least since the time of Hammurabi (1810-1750 B.C) the law that all know by intuition has been codified and required conformity. The substance of the law as it appears in both the kingdoms of the left and right hands is the same law in which God is at work in those who enforce it and those who abide by it. Conformity to the law in the kingdom of the left hand assures safety, peace, and prosperity.

In the kingdom of the right hand, law might at first appear as a negative action of God, but its ultimate purpose is beneficial in that in condemning the hearer it prepares for hearing the gospel and receiving its benefits. Without the law, the gospel's promises would fall on deaf ears. Law creates a sense of sin and awakens guilt. Gospel is presented as the divine solution for sin and guilt and is given in special revelation in the kingdom of the right hand that was first spoken and then recorded by the prophets and apostles and now proclaimed by preachers. So, the ministry as we possess it is a matter of the right hand.

The experience of predictable moral failure in the kingdom of the right hand is compensated by comparative moral success in the kingdom of left hand. Perfect conformity to civil law is possible, though rare. Even unbelievers achieve a high level of conformity and through the beneficence of the wealthy science and the arts are advanced. However, no one is perfect, as the common adage goes. What this really means that those who say this see themselves close to perfection. Such moral failures are seen as peccadilloes that are more than compensated by a person's moral successes. It becomes a matter of accounting in balancing the books with the intention that one will come out in the black. Law in both the kingdoms is a cause-and-effect matter with rewards for compliance and threats of punishment for non-compliance. While in the kingdom of the right failure is predictable. In the left hand pride in accomplishment is attainable In both kingdoms law without threat law is less law or no law at all and in the kingdom of the right hand law without penalty obviates the need for atonement.

A convenient distinction is saying that law comes with threats and gospel with promises of salvation, but it does not take into account that disregard of the gospel has consequences more dreadful than failing to fulfill the law.⁴ For disregarding the law the former there is atonement, but for disregarding the gospel there is no solution. Let me provide his anecdote. An elderly friend thought that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had done away with the doctrine of hell when it replaced "he descended into hell" in the Apostles' Creed with "he went to the dead." His thinking seemed at first convoluted, but if Jesus did not descend into hell, it was reasonable to think hell did not exist. He was looking for an excuse to dispose of the idea of hell and he found in the new liturgy.

The two-kingdom paradigm is a uniquely Lutheran way of thinking and is not a factor in how most other Christians and obviously non-Christians understand reality the world and the church. Since Lutherans regard it as universal paradigm, it can help in understanding how others understand good works. Catholics do not draw a sharp line between the two kingdoms and so works done in the civil realm are meritorious for salvation before one comes to faith or even if one never comes to faith.⁵ Good works that exceed ordinary expectations and have specific religious specifications are called works of supererogation and have a great value to obtaining salvation. For the Reformed good works can be done by the elect, even if they do not come to faith. When civil works within a Christian or non-Christian context are seen as a righteousness benefitting the salvation of one who do them, ethics and the ethical life take on an autonomous existence, because their value is judged by how they benefit society and not as fruits or products of faith. Within the secular sphere, that is the left hand, philanthropic works are given a religious value that is often celebrated at death by survivors who point to accomplishments of the deceased as deserving entrance into whatever pleasant afterlife they envisage for the deceased. Government leaders and other famous people come to be revered with saintlike devotion. Honors given to the fallen military bestow national sainthood. The capitol building in Washington, D.C. could easily pass as the pantheon in Rome. Mohammed Ali preached his own gospel that if everyone loved others half as much as the world love him, it would be a better world. At the ESPN awards on the night of July 13, 2017 he took on messianic stature in that his admirers urged others to follow him. Shortly thereafter the rap singer Prince had already been canonized by the popular culture until it was learned that he died from an overdose. For the common man, pleas for entrance into heaven of the left hand come in the form of eulogies and obituaries and that heaven is populated with a multitude of saints and gods. Luther's view that each person creates gods for himself takes place in the kingdom of the left hand and the value of person is based on what he

⁴ Matthew 12: 32 "And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come;" Lk 12: 10 "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."

⁵ Article in First Things where Jews and Catholics share in the afterlife.

has done. The kingdom of the left has a religion of its own making.6

Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms provides a useful division for believers in that exceptional accomplishments and even sacrificial ones in the kingdom of the left hand can receive well deserved honors without infringing on his basic doctrine that justification before God is never a human accomplishment. One can simultaneously live in both worlds or realities as if he was almost two different persons. The two-kingdom doctrine keeps separate what can never be brought together. To rephrase the marriage rite, what God has put asunder, let no one bring together - but of course nearly everyone does and it happened during Luther's own lifetime. Just as the Catholics saw salvatory value in works of the civil righteousness, the Anabaptists took the doctrine of justification that the gospel frees us from the law and its accusations as a reason to exempt themselves from governmental authority. Catholics handled the kingdom of the left hand as if it was the right hand and the Anabaptists regarded the kingdom of the right hand as if it was left. Less radical Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, heirs of English Puritanism and John Calvin, use the authority of the kingdom of the left hand to advance the kingdom of the right hand and in this way, they resemble Reformation era Catholics.

In soliciting the support of the princes in the cause of the Reformation, Luther may have crossed the boundary between the two kingdoms, but this was how the world was at that time. One day ducal Saxony was Catholic and the next day it was Lutheran. Documents collected in the Book of Concord had as much a political standing as they did a theological standing. Since the time of Roman emperor Theodosius, kings, princes and then town councils determined the religion of their subjects and these things were not about to change in the Reformation. The Peace of Augsburg allowed Catholic and Lutheran options and the Peace of Westphalia put the Reformed faith on the menu. There was a time when the cuius regius cuius religio ptinciple could be used to good advantage. Then came the Prussian rulers enforcing their Lutheran subjects to compromise with the Reformed religion. An obvious solution is removing the shackles of the Constantine from the kingdom of the right hand, but instead of religious revival in the kingdom of the right hand, both kingdoms, church and society, have shifted into reverse and the gears have slipped into outright secularism. Less and less do the churches have a consulting role in the affairs of the left hand and in many cases, they have adopted aspects of the left hand's agenda that are contrary not only to what the church espouses but the natural law. It seems that more and more there is only one kingdom, the kingdom of the left, that encroaches on the kingdom of the right.

Luther's doctrine of the two kingdom has a practical value in serving as an escape valve for his doctrine of justification by allowing good works that have no place in the kingdom of right hand to be done with a good conscience in the kingdom of the left hand. With the doctrine of the two-kingdoms, where it is properly understood and carried out, Lutherans are given the best of two worlds. What is taken away with

the right hand is returned with the left hand. A Christian lives within two different spheres. Before God a believer is devoid of moral self-confidence but in the world, he can confidently carry out his vocation he and fulfill God's will. Believers who have no sense of self-worth in one kingdom can have a sense of self-accomplishment in the other. A life lived only within the dimension of the kingdom of the right hand can have dire consequences for those with a disposition toward despondency. Psychological and spiritual depression can easily feed off each other, as was arguably the case with Luther who found a solution for despondency in a vigorous engagement with the world.

By involving himself in political matters and in offering all sorts of advice, Luther was involved in matters assigned to the left hand and so he lived a life of a secularist and could be regarded as a father of a secularism that came to bud in the 18th century. Eighteenth century Enlightenment figures saw the separation of the church and state as an extension of his two-kingdom doctrine.⁷ No longer did Luther view Catholics works of supererogation as good works and they held no value for the one who did them or for others. Though Luther's doctrine of the law was paralleled by his psychological depression, he lived a life in which he could still enjoy himself, as much as this was possible for a person of his temperament. So, he earned himself a place in the hearts of Luther scholars who are otherwise in bondage to the Reformed understanding of sanctification: a spiritually regulated life. For these Reformed scholars, Luther was a great guy, even if he was too Catholic for them. Luther was, the Jews say, a Mensch in a way Calvin could never be. If we want biblical support for a life lived in the two kingdoms that would have Luther-like dimensions, there might be no better place to look than the Book of Ecclesiastes, whose writer is so overcome with the meaningless of life, that he gives himself over to its pleasures. In his desperation with life, Solomon could pass as a pre-Christian era Luther.

The kingdom of the left hand is as wide and broad as life itself. Participating in the government and, not only submitting to it, getting married, raising a family, but choosing a vocation for gainful employment to support one's family and contributing to noble cases is what the kingdom of the left hand is all about. These are not only acceptable behaviors but also encouraged behaviors. In the kingdom of the left hand, the believer can become all he was wants to be, to rephrase a recruitment pitch of some years back for the Unites States Army. It has an almost theological ring to it, even if it is tinged with synergism, but synergism outlawed in the kingdom of the right hand is permissible and even commendable in the right hand. Even if in the kingdom of the left hand the sky is not the limit, it offers an array of possibilities absent in the kingdom of the right hand. Passivity in the kingdom of the right hand gives way to

^{7 &}quot;The Two Kingdoms Doctrine," Wikipedia. "James Madison, the principal author of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, explicitly credited Martin Luther as the theorist who "led the way" in providing the proper distinction between the civil and the ecclesiastical spheres. Luther's distinction was adopted by John Milton and John Locke. Milton wrote A Treatise of Civil Power. Locke later echoed the "two kingdoms" doctrine: There is a twofold society, of which almost all men in the world are members, and from that twofold concernment they have to attain a twofold happiness; viz. That of this world and that of the other: and hence there arises these two following societies, viz. religious and civil."

excessive activism in the left hand, if so desired. Life lived in either kingdom is in a way a matter of temperament. Hyper-activity of the left hand has no place in the kingdom of the right hand where one places himself at the mercy of God and relies not on one's works but those of Christ. Lack of Missouri Synod lay participation in public life might be laid at the door of the lack of serious engagement in Luther's two kingdom doctrine, but this is a matter for another time.

Things done in the kingdom of the left hand by non-Christians no matter are beneficial to society are inherently self-serving, even if they are not recognized as such. Here some works have less value than others. Those done only for self-enhancement may have no value at all. We are bombarded with a generous supply of self-improvement techniques ranging from what we should eat and how we should exercise. Yoga is the modern replacement for monastic meditation. This is a secularism in the left hand in which self-improvement becomes a type of sanctification. Jesus points to the futility of such works: "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?" (Mt 6:27). In other words, no matter what you do, you are not going to live a day longer than what God intended. Multiple opportunities in the left hand eventually come to a dead end. Works with promise of a longer life bear a marked similarity to the Catholic works of supererogation (which promise a better afterlife.) Religious attitudes about life lived before God that belong properly to the right hand are transferred into the kingdom of the left hand where even the idea of God is no longer necessary. Religions flourish more successfully in the kingdom of the left hand than the true religion does in the kingdom of the right hand. Mingling of the left and rights hands is common, perhaps inevitable. In the Germany of the 1930s and 40s the kingdom of the right hand was submerged and drowned into virtual non-existence by German nationalism. At first German Christianity looked like the kingdom of the right hand with a bishop, clergy, and liturgy, but underneath was a paganism of the left hand. This was the reverse of what was proposed by Constantine and advanced by Theodosius, by which the state would live by principles of the right hand. Baptism was a prerequisite for Roman citizenship and this was the rule until recently throughout Europe. Already in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment scholars saw in Luther's two-kingdoms doctrine an opportunity to secularize the left hand and by the end of the twentieth century the world of Constantine was at the edge of complete disintegration and the kingdom of the left hand had freed itself from bondage to the right hand and was conquering it. This was done by atheistic Communism and that was enforced in the Soviet occupied countries. Other countries voluntarily went down this path. A place for explicit religious thought was gradually eliminated in the left hand and God talk became forbidden speech. In America the process was different but the results were the same. Where once religious affiliation was an advantage and implicitly required in striving for political office in Europe, it no longer is. At the first 9/11 commemoration in 2001 a hew and cry went up about a Missouri Synod pastor participating in all faiths service. That problem has been resolved in more recent commemorations. At one occasion, an iron beam was carried out of the ruins and at the 2015 commemoration

the American flag was carried by vested fire fighters as it if were a sacred icon. If the kingdom of the right hand is recognized by preaching the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, the offering of prayers and the singing of hymns, then like a ship going towards the horizon, it is headed for invisibility. In adopting the agenda of the world, mainline churches in America slipped from the right hand into the left.

Biblical support for the concept of the two kingdoms may be extracted from the response of Jesus to Pilate's claim that he had the power of life and death over Jesus. Pilate would have no power unless it was given to him from above, an answer the governor understands since he then was determined to release Jesus but the cries of the crowd convinced him to act against what he knows what is right (In 19:10-12). In the kingdom of the left hand, recognition of the true God is not necessary but only the acknowledgment that a higher power exists controlling all things. Recognition of the divine in the left hand may no longer be the case except mentioning the name of God in ceremonial ways. Also informative for a doctrine of the two kingdoms is the account of the collectors of half shekel tax, probably the temple tax. Peter is asked if Jesus and his disciples will pay it. Following Jesus' directive, Peter catches a fish with a coin in its mouth to pay it. Here the two kingdoms lie side by side, but the kingdom Jesus brings is the superior and so not subject to taxation. Payment of the tax is made to avoid the resentment of those who do not know the two kingdom distinction.8 God works in the kingdoms of the left and right in different ways, but his real kingdom is the kingdom of the right hand, that is, the kingdom of the heavens. Those who belong to it are the sons of the kingdom of the heavens, that is the followers of Jesus, are exempt from taxation by the kingdom of the left hand. Until recently certain members of the British royal family were exempt from taxation. That has changed, but this was the principle that was in force for years. Though in the left hand Christians submit themselves to ruling authorities and work for the improvement of society, the kingdom of left hand will pass away. The kingdom of right hand does not. Saying that the two kingdoms are of equal importance is cliche, but not true.

TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Closely related to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms but not identical to it is the two kinds of righteousness that is being offered in recent years as a paradigm alongside of the law and the gospel as a way of understanding the reality in which Christians relate to God and to the world. In contrast to the two kingdoms concept of how God works differently in the world than he does in the church, the two kinds of righteousness concept has to do with how the Christian relates to God by faith and then to the world. Righteousness to God, *coram deo*, is passive in that believers

⁸ When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came home, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself" (Mt 17:24-27).

are declared righteous before God on account of Christ by faith. This is the classical Lutheran doctrine of justification. A second kind of righteousness, the righteousness before the world, coram mundo, is active in that the believer engages in the world. It might be described as civil righteousness in that it provides ethical directives for life in this world. Righteousness before God coram deo is a vertical righteousness in that it deals with a believer's relationship with God. Righteousness before the world, coram mundo, is a horizontal righteous because it directs how a Christians interact in ethical matters with others whether or not they are Christians. This definition of the two kinds of righteousness found in Wikipedia was probably written by a Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod exponent of the method.

"In theology 'to be righteous is to be human as God envisioned in creation and again redemption.' Lutherans believe that there are two dimensions to being a human creature,' or two relationships that define human nature. The first dimension defines man's relationship with God and the second defines man's relationship with his human neighbors and the rest of God's creation. 'In the former we receive righteousness before God through faith on account of Christ. In the latter, we achieve righteousness in the eyes of the world by works when we carry out our God-given responsibilities."

The two kinds of righteousness hypothesis is drawn from a sermon Luther delivered in 1518 and like the doctrine of the two kingdoms, it is useful in providing preachers who are so bound to a law and gospel paradigm that they avoid employing the imperatives in their sermons, even when such ethical imperative are present in the biblical texts. Ethical command that is not possible in the passive or vertical righteousness is possible in the active or horizontal righteousness. These two kinds of righteousness let the passivity in which faith receives Christ's righteousness stand side by side with an activism in the world, *coram mundo*, by which the believer can have a sense of self-satisfaction for his accomplishments. In going out of the nave into the narthex and through the church doors, the Christian adopts a different persona. Rather than being dependent on God for salvation, he assumes a bold posture in the world, *coram mundo*, to do what needs to be done. In his life in the world, he finds his place in society and fulfills the obligations of his vocation without fear of having violated his justification before God in which works have no place.

A few observations can be made about the two kinds of righteousness paradigm. According to the accessed definition, horizontal righteousness has an environmental component in that the Christian cares for the world. 'World' here means the natural world, the earth. In his being created in the image of God, man is given the responsibility care for the earth and its creatures (Gn. 1:28), but it is another thing to say that this responsibility is best spelled out by the agenda of the various environmental movements which at times seem to place an equal or even higher value on irrational creatures and

⁹ Wikipedia/wiki/The_two_kinds_of-rigtheousness, 1/5. Accessed on 7/5/2016. Quotations in this citation are taken from Charles Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and gospel in the Apology," Lutheran Quarterly XV (2001):420-421.

the inanimate creation than it does on human beings.

As valuable as the horizontal righteousness is in taking responsibility for the earth, God has not abdicated his authority over his creation, as proposed by eighteenth century Deists. In the prayers of the church God is still properly addressed as King of the Universe and he attains his purposes by working directly in creation and even in the desires of evil men, a teaching that is at the heart of the two-kingdom doctrine. In Lutheran theology and more so in Reformed theology, God's work in the world is placed under the locus of providence with this distinction that Reformed present themselves as more capable of seeing what God is doing in nature than Lutherans do. For Lutherans only in the kingdom of the right hand is God's will revealed. At the heart of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, is the God who works differently in each one.

As valuable as the two kinds or righteousness is, it can never be proposed that the Christian works in and towards the world, *coram mundum*, without the awareness that God may be at work in the world in a way he does not and really cannot understand. In working with other Christians and non-Christians, Lutherans cannot detach them that God's purposes in the world may not be theirs. Lutherans acknowledged a common ethical ground with some philosophers like Aristotle (Apology 4:14-15), but a word of caution is in order in giving a blank check to the moral principles of other religions and those who have no religion at all when it is said,

"the Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Atheists [who] are capable of being faithful spouses, loving parents, and hard-working employees. Christian and non-Christians perform many of the same external civil works. They often share a common understanding of Ethics." 10

Whether Christians share a common understanding of ethics can only be answered on a case by case basis. It can be argued that Christians do not understand marriage in the same way Muslims and atheists do. While they may hold that we should not do to others what we would not want done to ourselves, they do not have the rule that we should do the good we want for ourselves. Such groups may promote teachings and practices contrary to Christian faith and natural law.

Luther's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount was a response to the medieval Catholic interpretation: that its seemingly impossible mandates were only applicable to those who had taken religious vows and so were regarded by others and themselves as the spiritually elite. The Anabaptists used the Sermon to exempt themselves from submission to civil authorities and to live own community governed by the Sermon's mandates. Luther was caught between the two unacceptable alternatives, one the work righteousness of the monks and the other the Anabaptists who saw in the Sermon a program for a perfect earthly society whose principles they could fulfill. In Luther's mind both were guilty of absenting themselves from the world. For Luther,

¹⁰ Wikipedia/wiki/The_two_kinds_of-rigtheousness, 3/5. Accessed on 7/5/2016.

¹¹ Susan E. Schreiner, "Martin Luther" The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spenser (Grand Rapids, MI: Bravos Press, 2007), 111-112.

the Sermon's requirements were as applicable now as at all times — not just to its first hearers. They applied to all Christians and not just to those who taken religious vows. In universalizing the principles of the Sermon, Luther was acting within the dimensions of his doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, but the challenge for him was providing an interpretation of the Sermon that kept intact the doctrine of justification by faith. Rewards promised in the Beatitudes could suggest that salvation came by works. He resolved the issue by holding that the Sermon had to do with the Christian life, that is, sanctification, the life he lived by faith. How a Christian lived in the world with others opened the door his application of his doctrine of the two kingdoms, but the Sermon's harsh penalties could not easily be pushed to the side. In the kingdom of the right hand, Christ ruled in the heart and Christians adopted a forgiving posture and in the kingdom of the left hand a Christians could hold those who offended them accountable, even if it meant taking them to court.

It was the difference between a spiritual and an external righteousness, very much like the proposal of the two kinds of righteousness, but perhaps not identical. The vertical righteousness, the righteousness before God, coram deo, righteousness has to do with faith and not works. For Luther the Sermon on the Mount requires forgiveness for wrongs. In the kingdom of the left hand, it was necessary for a Christian to engage the world on its own terms to maintain an external righteousness. This was not allowed in the kingdom of the right. So, his doctrine of the two kingdoms allowed opposing attitudes or behaviors. Each kingdom had its own kind of righteousness. In the right hand the Christians made no moral claims for himself, but in the left hand he could. They lived simply in two different universes. A Christian possessed two different personae, the one who trusted in Christ and the other engaged others whether or not they were Christian. Within this construct Luther's concept of the two kinds of righteousness emerges and for that matter his concept of the Christian's vocation. Simultaneously, a Christian is a spiritual person trusting in Christ and a secular person accepting the circumstances in which he finds himself as God's doing. Within the kingdom of the left hand, a Christian lives out his vocation by fulfilling the obligations God has given him. Vows made to follow a regulated religious way of life, as the monks had done, have no value. Since God had established the government, rebellion as carried out by the Anabaptist against the government to establish their own kingdom was wrong. A Christian fulfilling the obligations of his vocation, as ordinary these as could be, was given him by God and did not compromise his being justified by faith without works. As one scholar puts it, "The Christian, [Luther] said, consisted of two persons. The Christian was both a spiritual person and secular person at the same time."12 This led Luther to interpret Matthew 5:38-40 disallowing a Christian to go to rectify alleged wrongs in two different and even diametrical ways. Here is how one scholar explains it:

"The Christian lives simultaneously as a Christian toward everyone, personally suffering all things in the world, and as secular person, maintaining, using,

and performing all the functions required by the law of his territory or city, by civil law and domestic law $^{"13}$

In his heart the Christian had no ill will towards anyone and they do not take those who have wronged them to court, but as a secular person "he will oppose every evil within the limits of his office and may go to court to remedy some violence of injustice."14 A Christian lives two different and even opposing lives so that he becomes two persons. Behavior disallowed for the believer is permissible as he lives his life in the world.¹⁵ Luther found support of the bifurcation of the Christian's existence in the Sermon on the Mount and, it might be added, here was the foundation the two kinds of righteousness. It is more likely that it was the other way around. His doctrines of the two-kingdoms and the two kinds of righteousness predetermined how he would interpret the Sermon on the Mount. Had the Sermon not been placed as Jesus' first discourse in the first book of the New Testament canon, he might have preferred to pass over it as he did James and Jude that seemingly contradicted to his doctrine of justification and hence it had a limited attraction for him. With Luther's commitment to the Bible as the word of God and the prominent place of the Sermon, he like theologians since the first century, beginning with Luke and the writer of the Didache fulfilled an inner urge to provide an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Like Luther, their interpretations were microcosms of each writer's world view. In his interpretations Luther could and did not want to stray far from his doctrine of justification by faith without works. He found himself obligated to uphold the law and the gospel paradigm, but was unsatisfied with both options. One commentator expresses Luther's dilemma.

"Having been justified, the believer should then turn to the Sermon in order to find ethical instructions about living the life of faith. The Sermon, therefore, is not law, nor is it exactly the gospel; the moral injunction of the Sermon are the fruits of justification by faith." ¹⁶

He got around the difficulty by making Paul's doctrine of justification presuppositional for the Sermon on the Mount and its requirements he saw as the fruits of justifying faith. This was a useful solution, even if it would be difficult to show that Matthew thought in Pauline terms. Apart from that argument, it is historically suspect that a principle enunciated by Paul sometime after Jesus lived could be the foundation for what Jesus said, assuming, as we do, that the words of the Sermon are as close as any words in the gospels to what Jesus actually said. Had the gospel of Matthew been written near the end of the first century, as the majority of scholars hold, it would be reasonable to think that an editor knowledgeable of Paul's doctrine of justification, would have brought the Sermon's embarrassing complexity that later proved problematic for later interpreters in line with the apostle's teaching on

¹³ LW 21:113-114.

¹⁴ Schreiner, "Martin Luther," 116.

¹⁵ Schreiner, "Martin Luther," 116.

¹⁶ Schreiner, "Martin Luther," 111,

justification. Let's be clear, the Sermon on the Mount is pure Jesus. No one could have spoken the Sermon on the Mount unless he saw himself as God. Letting Paul be the norm for Jesus is putting the horse is in the wrong position in regard to the cart, but the two-kingdom doctrine allowed Luther to extricate himself from a looming impossible situation. In the process he bifurcated the Christian into two persons, who one believed and was humble before God and other who could be as fully involved in the world as he wanted.

In interpreting the Sermon on the Mount Luther came upon the fly in his own ointment. God had ordained the kingdom of the left and was working in it, but Satan, the prince of this world, was persecuting the church. Rather than kingdom of the left hand being allied with the right hand for a common good, it had become that world in which Luther had been excommunicated, where Zwingli and his followers offered an unacceptable doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the fanatics engaged in war against the legally established authorities. Things were hardly better in the kingdom of the right hand where the false prophets were the wolves devouring the sheep. Also in the kingdom of the right hand were those who outwardly were devout, pious and religious, but were not really Christians. Surfacing in his interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount was his theology of cross that like Christ Christians should expect to suffer.¹⁷ In his own words, "If you want to be God's child, therefore, prepare yourself for persecution."¹⁸ Whatever positive things Luther may have said about the kingdom of the left hand is mitigated by its being the abode of God's enemies.

"Since the beginning of this sermon Christ has been saying that whoever intends to be a Christian must consider this. In the first place, he will have to bear the brunt of the enemies outside Christendom. They will oppose him, hate him and harm him. They will strike and strangle him. At least, they will slander, curse, and condemns him." ¹⁹

As Luther worked through the Sermon on the Mount, he became less concerned with how it provided a program for moral or ethical living and understood it more and more from an eschatological perspective and in the sense the Evangelist Matthew intended. Life described in the Sermon was lived in a fallen world, a point does not fit neatly into Luther's concepts of the two-kingdoms and the two kinds of righteousness. God is in control of the world, but most of the time it does not seem so. The world's righteousness that should correspond to the horizontal righteousness of Christians does not in each case match up. Though it is cliche to hold that one kingdom is as important as the other and similarly that one kind of righteousness is as deserving as attention as the other, the use of the conjunction 'and' can lead to the false view they are equal importance to God and to Christians. God uses the evil of the world to advance his purposes, but without going into partnership with it. A Christian accommodates himself to the evil world, but does not work with it. Following in the wake of John the

¹⁷ Schreiner, "Martin Luther,"117.

¹⁸ Schreiner, "Martin Luther," 122. LW 21, 45.

¹⁹ LW 248.

Baptist, Jesus was preaching judgment against those who rejected him. This was not a law and the gospel matter. For the Sermon justification is past tense. His followers would soon come face to face with the judge — and He was that judge.

Now we have come to that point in asking whether the Sermon on the Mount is compatible with Luther's understanding of justification and the two kingdoms. While it may not be recognized, the first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of the heavens," is first of all a description of Jesus who made no demands on God and secondly of the Christian who in faith makes no claims on God, but accepts by faith what God prescribes for him. A sign of their dependency on God is laid out in the Eighth Beatitude which is parallel in message and structure to the First Beatitude is their being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Encapsulated in these words, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness" is Christ's entire life and death, what is called in dogmatics the homo factus est. This is the self-description of the God-Man who says of himself that he is meek and lowly in spirit and invites us to come to him, but this is an invitation to share specifically in his suffering. "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on account of me." Here Christ separates himself from the believer and identifies himself as the righteousness of God and the reason that his followers are persecuted.

Perhaps it must be said that the word 'righteousness' as it is used in the paradigms of the God's left and right hands and the two kinds of righteousness in which the righteousness of the left hand and that of the horizontal righteousness is different from what the Sermon on the Mount proposes. In question is in Matthew 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is not a righteousness at all, but for Luther a righteousness that condemned them to hell.²⁰

There are places in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus uses items that belong to the left hand in a positive way to make a point. Lengthy prayers of the pagans should not be emulated. It is better to have one master instead of two. Birds of the air whom the Father feeds are examples for a faith that is certain that the Father feeds them. So also, the lilies of the field who do not make clothing for themselves but who glory exceeds Solomon's. On the surface this good advice for everyone is not worrying about tomorrow. This how the eighteenth-century Rationalists understood it. To show weary believers how they should trust in God and have no fear, Jesus reached in the kingdom of the left hand to make a point. Even people with evil motives take care of their children. So, how much more shall God care for his children.²¹

²⁰ LW 21, 73.

²¹ For a biblical exposition, readers may wish to consult the author's *The Church's First Statement of the Gospel: The Sermon on the Mount,* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 2000.

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